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Exploring Perceptions of Staff Preparedness for Emergency Response in Transitional Houses in Texas

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Walden University
2022

Abstract

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Houses in Texas

by

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MPhil, Walden University, 2020

MBA Webster University, 2004

B.Sc (Hons), University of Nigeria, 1984

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Disaster preparedness for emergency response within transitional houses is a problem

that often fails to receive attention, a situation that can lead to injuries or death during

disaster events. One of the factors responsible for this lapse is the contractual nature of

most of the transitional houses, with inherent inadequacies in types and quality of

services. Although research in this area is relatively scarce, a synthesis of literature

reviewed suggested greater focus on disaster management in other areas and almost

nothing with regards to transitional houses. The purpose of this qualitative study was to

better understand staff emergency preparedness in transitional houses in Texas. The

theoretical framework was the risk perception theory. The research question addressed

the perceptions of staff of transitional houses in Texas on preparedness for emergency

response. This was a qualitative study that used purposeful sampling, open-ended

interview, and document review as instruments. Fourteen participants were drawn from

staff and volunteers. Data from the interviews were coded and analyzed using thematic

coding as part of content analysis. Findings supported the position of previous

researchers on the need for staff and volunteers working in transitional houses to receive

proper training and periodic exercises. The positive social change impact included

providing administrators and policymakers a template for formulating and/or evaluating

policies designed to ensure effective emergency preparedness in transitional houses in

Texas. Such policy changes may also be adopted by other transitional houses, potentially

reducing safety concerns of the residents during disasters.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my late parents, Anthony Chilaka and Theresa Ojiugo Onuoha, who though did not have the benefit of western education, had a vision that their son must attain a university education. In their lifetime, they toiled in pursuit of that dream and my graduation for my first degree was arguably the happiest day of their lives. I imagine how happy they would have been to witness my attainment to the apogee of the academic ladder. Papa and mama, I hope this accomplishment will make your memory proud.

Acknowledgments

Accomplishing this phase of my academic journey was not the result of my effort alone, but rather was made possible with support from several people to whom I owe a ton of gratitude. But before mentioning names, I would first like to give special thanks to the almighty God whose steadfastness throughout this program was instrumental to the completion of this journey against all odds. I would like to thank my dear wife, Adaeze, and our two children Nkemjika and Jideofor, for their love, prayers, and support especially their tolerance of my absences and deprivations. By the same token, I thank my siblings, Joe, Rose, Stella, Ngozi, and Kate, for their prayers and encouragement. I want to thank Dr. Michael Brewer, my committee chair for his patience, understanding, and painstaking guidance. I also thank my methodical second committee member, Dr. Dana-Marie Thomas for working with me through the course of this journey. As a committee, your unwavering guidance and constructive feedback enabled the successful and timely completion of this dissertation. I am grateful to Dr. Karen Shafer who served as my URR, for meticulously overseeing this work. A special thanks go to my friend, Dr. George Njoku for his inspiration and consistent advice from the onset of my program and throughout the dissertation process. I thank Mr. Van Norman, my Coworker for proofreading, editing, and formatting the document. I would like to save the last but not the least slot for my best friend and colleague with whom I started and journeyed through the program. When we began this journey, I called him Linus, but today I am proud to address him as Dr. Linus Okahia. He maintained a visible presence throughout the course of this program, and I am thankful for his friendship and partnership.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Residents of transitional houses constitute part of the vulnerable population (i.e., a group whose unequal exposure, marginalization, and social stigma contribute to their vulnerability) making them more likely to be injured or killed during a disaster (Haddow et al., 2017; Settembrino, 2017). Their unique circumstances create obstacles to obtaining information in real-time that might aid in responding alongside the general population, to emergencies. These circumstances include but are not limited to lengthy incarceration and lack of family or social support system after release.

Transitional houses in Texas are managed by private agencies that may not be contractually obligated to follow stipulated emergency response protocols. This results in variations, inconsistencies, and inadequacies in types of services and levels of preparedness for emergency response (Hsieh & Hamilton, 2016). In 2005, then Governor Perry of Texas, issued executive order RP40 that compelled the state of Texas to adopt NIMS for incident management (Texas Department of Public Safety [TDPS], 2013). This order ensured the application of NIMS protocol in all aspects of emergency management operations in the state, by all agencies and organizations. It is unclear whether disaster preparedness in these transitional houses follows proper emergency management protocol that ensures preparedness. On the contrary, scholars such as Gin et al. (2019) suggested that service providers in such agencies are often inadequately prepared for disaster.

Reviewed literature indicated that whereas studies in disaster preparedness have been conducted among other segments of the vulnerable population group, these studies revealed a clear gap in the literature as it relates to preparedness for emergency response.

Specifically, there have been no studies on emergency preparedness in transitional houses especially from the perspective of staff. My study was designed to fill this knowledge gap by exploring the perceptions of staff preparedness in transitional houses in Texas. Results from this study could enable management of transitional houses in Texas to gain a better understanding of proper emergency preparedness protocol, as well as provide administrators and policymakers a template for formulating and/or evaluating policies designed to ensure effective emergency preparedness and response in transitional houses.

In Chapter 1 of this study, I presented the background to the study, highlighting the need for the study. I then proceeded to present the problem statement, purpose statement and pose the research question. This was followed by a brief overview of the theoretical foundation which provided the framework that enabled me to address the research question. This chapter also includes the nature of the study as well as the contextual definition of certain terms used in the study. Certain assumptions were made in the study and these, as well as scope and delimitations, form part of the chapter. Finally, I addressed the significance of the study, and the study's contribution to positive social change, concluding the chapter with a summary of the various sections discussed.

Background

The central focus of this study was to explore the perception of staff preparedness in responding to disasters in transitional houses in Texas. The study was informed by the need to direct focus on the safety of residents of transitional houses, a population group whose unequal exposure, marginalization, and social stigma contribute to their vulnerability, making them more likely to be injured or killed during a disaster

(Settembrino, 2017). Transitional houses are facilities that provide consistent shelter and support that allow residents to redirect their energies toward acquiring long-term skills and tools needed to move toward self-sufficiency (Gin et al., 2019). The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ, n.d.), contracts with these private facilities to provide residential services for its clientele, and about 2,000 persons are sheltered in the transitional houses in Texas which constitutes the focus of this study.

As facilities used to provide treatment or rehabilitate previously incarcerated persons, transitional houses are often privately managed, leading to variations, inconsistencies, and inadequacies in types of services and levels of preparedness for emergency response (Hsieh & Hamilton, 2016). In a study by Gin et al. (2019), the authors suggested that nonprofit homeless service providers, which include transitional houses, are often inadequately prepared for disasters. This underscores the need for a standardized blueprint for the management of emergency response operations in transitional houses, consistent with acceptable and recognized industry standards to ensure the safety of residents.

A review of current literature suggested that several scholars had previously examined disaster preparedness among certain vulnerable populations. Such studies included hospitals in North Texas (Njoku, 2015), college campuses (Connolly, 2016), elderly population (Harris, 2018), homeless veterans (Gin et al., 2019), and prisoners (Purdum, 2019). In my research, I found no studies on disaster preparedness in transitional houses, especially from the perspective of the staff. My study was designed to fill this knowledge gap by exploring the perceptions of staff preparedness in transitional

houses in Texas. Results from this study could enable management of transitional houses in Texas to gain a better understanding of proper emergency preparedness protocol, necessary for effective disaster response, as well as provide administrators and policymakers a template for formulating and/or evaluating policies designed to ensure effective emergency preparedness and response in transitional houses.

Problem Statement

There are eight privately operated transitional houses (Residential Reentry Centers) in the state of Texas ("Texas Department of Criminal Justice," n.d.). Transitional houses are facilities that house individuals on parole or mandatory supervision, placed there either immediately upon release from penitentiary or upon referral from field parole staff ("Texas Department of Criminal Justice," n.d.). In addition to providing temporary housing for these residents, transitional houses offer consistent structure and support that allow these individuals to acquire long-term skills and tools needed to achieve self-sufficiency (Gin et al., 2019).

Transitional housing facilities are run by private agencies (Gin et al., 2019; Hsieh & Hamilton, 2016). These agencies are considered second circle organizations, whose emergency response is secondary to their core mission (Hambridge et al., 2017). Importantly, these private agencies do not receive federal funding, hence they are not contractually obligated to adhere to any emergency preparedness procedure (Hambridge et al., 2017). Volunteers who constitute part of the staff are largely untrained (Brown, 2018; Kirkpatrick, 2017). Consequently, there are variations, inconsistencies, and

inadequacies in types and levels of preparedness for emergency response (Hsieh &

Hamilton, 2016).

Very little was known about staff preparedness for emergency response at the

transitional houses (Gin et al., 2019). Over the last 5 years, there had been numerous

studies that focused on emergency preparedness among other segments of the vulnerable

population group. These studies revealed a clear gap in the literature as it relates to

disaster response in transitional houses. My study aimed to fill this knowledge gap by

exploring the perceptions of staff preparedness in transitional houses. Results from this

study could enable management of transitional houses in Texas to gain a better

understanding of proper emergency preparedness protocol, as well as provide

administrators and policymakers a template for formulating and/or evaluating policies

designed to ensure effective emergency preparedness and response in transitional houses.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand staff emergency

preparedness in transitional houses in Texas. The positive social change impact included

providing administrators and policymakers a template for formulating and/or evaluating

policies designed to ensure effective emergency preparedness and response in transitional

houses in Texas.

Research Question

RQ: What are the perceptions of staff (employees and volunteers), on disaster

preparedness of transitional houses in Texas?

Theoretical Framework

The risk perception theory [RPT] provided the theoretical framework for this study. Barnett et al. (2005) applied this theory in research that explored workforce preparedness training. According to the authors, RPT should be applied to understand staff perceptions of emergency preparedness, an understanding that can help illuminate staff ability and willingness to respond to disasters. They argued that staff are not just risk purveyors but represent communities that have specific perceptions that must be addressed in emergency preparedness training. When applied to this qualitative study, RPT provided a framework that enabled an understanding of staff perceptions of their level of preparedness to undertake emergency response in transitional houses. Barnett et al. further suggested that uncertainty regarding working environment safety as well as unclear expectations of role-specific emergency response are among the barriers that inhibit staff emergency response capabilities and must be addressed during preparedness training. Detailed application of this theoretical construct to the research is provided in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

This was a general qualitative study that relied on interviewing and document review as the main sources of data. This is consistent with the views held by Ravitch and Carl (2016), who stated that interviews are at the center of most qualitative studies since they provide deep, rich individualized data central to qualitative research. Sandelowski (2000) concurred, suggesting that researchers conducting qualitative studies, avail themselves of the chance to collect as much data as they can, which allows them to

capture all the elements of an event or phenomenon. Thus, a qualitative approach enabled me to obtain more in-depth and detailed information on the topic of preparedness for emergency response in transitional houses (see O' Sullivan et al., 2017). Since the qualitative methodology is a preferred method of inquiry by social scientists who study individuals or organizational behavior in their natural settings (Ravitch & Carl, 2020), the transitional housing setting fits this method of inquiry. I used an in-depth, semi structured, open-ended method of interviewing (see Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Sandelowski, 2000) to gather information on the perception of staff preparedness for emergency response in transitional houses. Open-ended interviews allow respondents to freely discuss challenges and needs experienced in their effort to ensure organizational preparedness without being overly constrained by predetermined responses (Gin et al., 2016). Additionally, open-ended interviews encourage flexibility, probes, and follow-up questions that helped elicit richer information (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

This study covered transitional houses in Texas, and purposive sampling of 14 participants was drawn from various stakeholders, including employees and volunteers. These were people believed to be knowledgeable in the phenomenon of study and therefore able to provide relevant information. Patton (2015) contended that the logic and power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases which yield insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations. Purposive sampling also has the advantage of increasing the scope or range of data as well as uncover an array of perspectives from the sample of participants (Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

Definitions

Disaster: An event that exceeds the emergency response and recovery capabilities and resources of the agencies and officials responsible for its management in one or more critical areas (Haddow et al., 2017). An event or a series of events that threaten and disrupt people's lives and livelihoods caused by both natural and/or man-made factors, resulting in fatalities, environmental damage, property losses, and psychological impacts (Akbar et al., 2020).

Disaster preparedness: A continuous cycle of planning, organizing, training, equipping, exercising, evaluation, and improvement activities to ensure effective coordination and the enhancement of capabilities to prevent, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of disasters, natural or man-made (Rotich, 2019). The development of a response plan and training first responders to save lives and keep disaster damage to a minimum (Sylves, 2019). It is a state of readiness to respond to a disaster, crisis, or any other type of emergency situation (Haddow et al., (2017).

Emergency management: The managerial function charged with creating the framework within which communities reduce vulnerability to hazards and cope with disasters (McEntire, 2018; Tucker, 2014).

Hazards: A potential threat to humans and their welfare, arising from a dangerous phenomenon or substance that may cause loss of life, injury, or property damage (Sylves, 2019).

National Incident Management System (NIMS): NIMS provides for all levels of governments, NGOs, and the private sector to work together to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from incidents (DHS, 2017).

Risk: The combination of the probability of a hazardous event and its negative consequences (Sylves, 2019).

Staff: Transitional housing staff consists of (a) employees of the organizations that manage the transitional houses and (b) volunteers, including parole officers who assist in emergency response during disasters.

Transitional houses: Temporary residential facilities that provide consistent shelter and support that allow residents to redirect their energies toward acquiring long-term skills and tools needed to move toward self-sufficiency (Gin et al., 2019).

Volunteer: A person, who, having carried out the duties of every citizen, places, his/her own capacity at the disposal of others, for the community or for full humanity. He/she operates in a free gratuitous manner promoting creative and effective responses to the needs of the beneficiaries of his/her action and contributing to the realization of common goods' (International Year of Volunteers, 2001). In the context of disasters and emergencies, volunteerism refers to all disaster responders who are not bound by a contractual or statutory obligation, but who act out of their own free will (Albris & Lauta, 2019).

Vulnerable population: Any group or community whose circumstances create barriers to obtaining or understanding information, or the ability to react as the general population. Circumstances that may create barriers include, but are not limited to age,

physical, mental, emotional, or cognitive status, culture; ethnicity; religion; language; citizenship; geography; or socioeconomic status (Nick et al., 2009). They are those whose peculiar characteristics expose them to greater risk during emergency situations than other citizens (Haddow et al., 2017).

Assumptions

This qualitative study relied on a few assumptions which included but were not limited to the following. Firstly, I assumed that each interviewee or participant would be honest and forthright in the information they provided to ensure accuracy of conclusions reached. This is because inaccurate information would most certainly have resulted in faulty conclusions. Secondly, this study was based on my assumption that all participants may have experienced some type of disaster while at the transitional house, or may have partaken in the preparation for one, and so would honestly and willingly share their experiences as it relates to preparedness. It was further assumed that both employees and volunteers at these transitional houses may have received some training in disaster preparedness either during their professional careers or as part of preparedness for an impending disaster. Finally, I assumed that as a researcher I would have unfettered access to archival documents as an additional source of data.

Scope and Delimitations

This study was limited to transitional houses in Texas. In 2005, then Governor Perry of Texas, issued executive order RP40 that compelled the state of Texas to adopt NIMS for incident management (TDPS, 2013). This order not only ensured the application of NIMS protocol in all aspects of emergency management operations in the

state, by all agencies and organizations, it made the study and/or evaluation of disaster preparedness more prominent. Eight of these agencies (transitional houses) are in Texas, one of which constituted the focus of this study. And although this scope covered the targeted area for the research, it only accounted for a fraction of the total number of transitional houses in the state of Texas. This limited scope, while considered adequate for a qualitative study, may potentially affect the generalizability of the research findings.

As indicated earlier in this study, there is a paucity of current data about disaster preparedness as it relates to staff in transitional houses in Texas. It is expected that this study could help bridge the gap in knowledge and that the findings could increase an understanding of staff perceptions of disaster preparedness in transitional houses- an understanding that could help guide current policies/practices regarding disaster preparedness in transitional houses.

Finally, the scope of this research was limited to only privately-operated transitional houses in Texas or first-tier transitional houses, and home only to releasees or previously incarcerated persons. It did not extend to second or third-tier transitional houses which includes treatment facilities, shelters, or group homes. Further research is recommended to accommodate such facilities to create a more comprehensive understanding of disaster preparedness in transitional houses in Texas.

Limitations

As is the case in most qualitative studies, the honest intention of the researcher is limited by certain extraneous circumstances. Thus, this particular study suffered from its own limitations, including, but not limited to the following. Firstly, the scope of the study

only covered one out of the eight state-contracted transitional houses in Texas. This scope, as well as the selected sample participants, while considered sufficient for a qualitative study may be deemed inadequate in terms of generalizability. Secondly, I contended with constant reassurance of staffers who exhibited some discomfort and/or reluctance regarding the risk of participation. Thirdly, researcher bias is often an ethical consideration associated with qualitative research and was the case in this study. I have been a parole officer with the Texas department of criminal justice, parole division, spanning a period of about 15 yrs. Although I have worked different caseloads during my career, I have only covered the halfway house or transitional center caseload very briefly in a volunteer capacity. As a parole officer, therefore, the risk of subjectivity was inherent in this study but was effectively managed through triangulation, peer review, and member checking.

Finally, this study took place at the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic with its attendant implications. For instance, the field study was originally designed to be conducted at two locations of the organization. The idea for a second location was shelved as the facility was said to be on lockdown at the time. By the same token, at the main facility where the study was conducted, a focus group was discouraged because of the need to abide by CDC restrictions regarding the clustering of persons. Therefore, I relied solely on individual face-to-face interviews complemented by document review, for my data collection.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lay in the contributions the results portend for the management of disasters in transitional houses. A study of staff preparedness would be beneficial to the many parole officers serving the more than 2,000 parolees living in transitional houses in Texas (TDCJ, n.d.). The TDCJ and the correctional departments in Texas could use the information generated from the research study, to help bring their facilities and staff into compliance.

A clear understanding of the preparedness protocols, including training and exercises as outlined in the NIMS and adopted by the American Correctional Association (ACA) may help advance transitional staff disaster preparedness by providing them the foundation for effective incident response and management Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS, 2011). In this way, it would enable administrators and policymakers to gain a better understanding of proper emergency preparedness procedures, which would in turn, aid in formulating and/or evaluating policies geared towards ensuring effective emergency preparedness response in transitional houses.

The gap in the literature search was the apparent lack of studies about disaster preparedness in transitional houses. Specifically, there had been no studies on emergency preparedness from the perspective of staff in transitional houses. I sought to fill this gap by expanding the existing body of knowledge and offering rich resources and data that can aid future research.

Contribution to Positive Social Change

Social change is at the core of Walden's mission and philosophy. For a Walden doctoral candidate, social change assumes a more pragmatic interpretation, signifying an expectation in one's role in the change process by, for instance, forcing a shift from a mere observer to that of an active participant in the process. Such change was envisaged as a product of this study as it signifies a better understanding and encourages the application of more pragmatic ways of handling disasters in transitional houses in Texas and possibly, beyond.

Therefore, one of the positive social change impacts includes the fact that the study could offer administrators and policymakers, a clearer understanding of the preparedness protocols, including training and exercises, as outlined in the NIMS and adopted by the ACA. This understanding may help advance staff disaster preparedness by providing them the foundation for effective incident response and management and a template for formulating and/or evaluating policies designed to ensure effective emergency preparedness and response in transitional houses. Such policy changes may be adopted by other transitional houses thereby potentially reducing safety concerns of the residents during disasters.

Summary

This chapter opened with an introduction followed by a background to the study. I then proceeded to state the problem and purpose statements, indicating what social problem the study intended to solve. I followed this by posing the research question and introduced the theoretical foundation which provided the framework that enabled the

research question to be answered. The nature of the study informed what approach or

methodology I considered most appropriate for the study, and in this case, a general

qualitative methodology was preferred. Then, I proceeded to provide a concise definition

of certain terms considered unique to the study to enhance easy comprehension by the

reader. The assumptions, scope, and delimitations as well as major limitations were

discussed, ending the chapter with the significance of the study and its contribution to

positive social change and a summary. In the next chapter, I present a review of relevant

literature to show what work had been done previously on the subject and the relevance

of my study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There have been no research studies conducted to examine staff preparedness for disaster response in transitional houses, resulting in very limited knowledge about the subject (Gin et al., 2019). Consequently, this dearth in studies created a knowledge gap necessitating the present study, the purpose of which was to better understand staff emergency preparedness in transitional houses in Texas.

Disasters, whether natural (e.g., earthquakes, hurricanes, storms), or man-made (e.g., wars, nuclear accidents, oil spillage, or terrorist attacks), share similar characteristics in terms of consequences, economic or social. For instance, in July 2011, a lone gunman murdered 77 Norwegians in a series of terrorist attacks regarded as the deadliest in Norway, a hitherto peaceful Nation (see Eyre, 2017). On Sept. 11, 2001, nearly 3000 innocent lives were taken away in a series of coordinated terrorist attacks in the now infamous 9/11 attacks in the United States. Similarly, in the UK, multiple acts of terrorism hit the nation in 2017, leaving 22 persons dead and about 116 wounded (see Skryabina et al., 2020).

The emotional deprivation and economic hardship visited upon the innocent families of the victims of these man-made disasters due to loss of lives, cannot be overemphasized. Similar economic losses resulted from other man-made disasters including environmental disasters. F or instance, Susskind et al. (2015), writing on environmental disaster, had reminded Americans of the enormous economic damage to wildlife caused by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Natural disasters on the other hand are no less lethal. In 2005, Hurricane Katrina, arguably the deadliest and costliest natural disaster in the U.S., resulted in over 1800 deaths with an additional 700,000 impacted by the floods and damage to homes (see Haddow et al., 2017; Pillai et al., 2019). In more recent times, the state of Texas witnessed its own worst natural disaster when Hurricane Harvey hit in 2017, causing 90 deaths with about 30,000 persons displaced from their homes, while over 200,000 properties were damaged (see Pillai et al., 2019). Citing a 2017 report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Mehta et al. (2020) suggested that Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, along with the California wildfires, collectively destroyed more than 420,000 homes throughout the United States in 2017 resulting in an economic loss of over $300 billion.

In a similar context, a series of earthquakes killed 185 people in Canterbury England in 2011 (Eyre, 2017). Bronfman et al. (2019) drew a more comprehensive estimate when they put the total estimated losses in terms of human and financial, including reconstruction costs between 1994 and 2013, at about USD 2.6 trillion, with global figures estimated at about $100 billion with 23, 000 fatalities in 2015 alone (see Horita, de Albuquerque & Marchezini, 2018). These statistics point to one basic fact, i.e., disasters, natural or man-made, are as deadly as they are costly and this is evidenced by the socioeconomic losses attendant therefrom.

Societies may not fully predict the occurrence of a disaster; they can at least prepare and equip individuals to deal with its occurrence and mitigate its anticipated

effects. It is safe to assume that how prepared a society, community, or organization is in dealing with disasters, may determine its resiliency in mitigating the impact of such disasters. Thus, disaster preparedness represents a critical component of the emergency management cycle and involves an integrated combination of planning, training, exercises, and personnel qualification thereby making its study very important (Baker & Ludwig, 2016).

In this study, I focused on disaster preparedness during emergency situations, with special reference to transitional houses. The purpose was to seek a better understanding of staff preparedness for disaster response. It is my hope that findings from the study could offer a clearer understanding of the preparedness protocols that may help advance disaster preparedness, by providing staff the foundation for effective incident response and management (see DHHS, 2011). Finally, given the dearth of studies regarding staff preparedness for emergency response in transitional houses (Gin et al., 2019), this research may contribute to the body of knowledge by offering a blueprint for proper emergency response, as well as provide resources for future research.

This chapter was divided into various sections and sub-sections, each dealing with a specific aspect of the literature on the topic. The introductory section was followed by a literature search strategy which discussed the approach employed in my literature search. The theoretical foundation identified the theory that provided the framework for the research and helped answer the research question. The historical evolution of emergency management was important to show the evolution of emergency management under

whose discipline disaster preparedness falls, as well as illustrate the developments and milestones that led to contemporary emergency management practice. Next, I discussed the four phases into which emergency management is divided, as a prelude to preparedness which as the focus of my research. At this point, I introduced the concept of transitional housing, its history, structure, and organization as well as its relationship with the TDCJ, the agency that institutionalized it as a program. I discussed the issues in disaster preparedness in transitional houses, following it up by identifying the synonymity between transitional housing and homelessness.

Disaster preparedness could be most successful with high-level collaboration, coordination, and partnerships (see Nohrstedt, 2016). This synergy was highlighted under subheadings such as multiagency collaboration, mutual aid partnerships, and the importance of elected officials. Volunteerism was seen as an integral component of disaster response and the next section discussed the role of volunteers in disaster preparedness in transitional houses. Next, I looked at the regulatory bodies that provide a guardrail for disaster preparedness in transitional houses to evaluate its compliance. Finally, I tried to establish a rationale for studying residents in transitional houses in the first place, before tying it all under summary and conclusion.

Literature Review Strategy

Due to the uniqueness of the topic of study, especially its focus on transitional houses and the paucity of data addressing it, I conducted an extensive literature search. The search included Walden University Library databases such as EBSCO databases, ProQuest, Walden dissertations, Political Science Complete, SAGE publications, and

Google Scholar. Open government records such as FEMA, SAMSHA, DHS, as well as

websites, and Archival records provided additional materials. The search terms

included *Emergency preparedness, Emergency management, Disaster*

management, *Disaster preparedness*, *transitional houses*, *Training,* and *Exercise*. The

search period spanned from 2015-2020, though a few older articles of relevance were

also featured.

Theoretical Foundation

According to Grant and Osanloo (2014), the theoretical framework is the

foundation upon which all knowledge is constructed for the research study and serves as

the structure and support for the rationale, the problem statement, the purpose,

significance, and the research question, as well as provide an anchor for the literature

review. In other words, the theoretical framework serves as the glue that holds the

different parts of the study together.

The RPT was applied as the basic theoretical framework for this study. The use

RPT for this study was appropriate as it enhanced an understanding of the theory's

robustness and applicability in explaining staff behavior and participation in emergency

response duties. More importantly, all constructs of the RPT were used to answer this

study's research question regarding the perceptions of staff of transitional houses in

Texas, on preparedness for emergency response. In a seminal work by Bauer (1960; as

cited in Wang et al., 2018; Bae & Chang, 2020), the author characterized consumers'

choices in terms of risk-taking or risk-reducing behaviors. Since then, risk perception has

been commonly thought of as emblematic of uncertainty regarding possible negative

consequences (Wang et al., 2018), or a perceived likelihood of a hazard event place (Rahm & Reddick, 2011; Sylves, 2019). The theory was further applied by Barnett et al. (2005) in a study that explored workforce preparedness training. According to the authors, RPT should be applied to understand staff perceptions of emergency preparedness, an understanding that can help illuminate their ability and willingness to respond to disasters. They argued that staff are not just risk purveyors but represent communities that have specific perceptions that must be addressed in emergency preparedness training.

In its original sense, Rahn et al. (2020), citing Knuth et al., (2014) and Slovic (1987) defined risk perception as the subjective judgment a person makes by characterizing and evaluating a hazard. The authors argued that in the occurrence of such hazards, warning messages can help prevent or mitigate various forms of damages by communicating risks, giving information, and recommending protective actions. This agrees with the communication-human information processing (C-HIP) model, constructed by Conzola and Wogalter (2001), and Wogalter (2006), as cited by Rahn et al., 2020. According to Rahn et al., the C-HIP model looked at the communication and processing of warning information with respect to disasters and concluded that warning messages are a means to inform about risk, thus making risk perception an important part of information processing

This safety construct can be applied to a perceived risk that compels the adoption of safety measures in response to disasters in transitional houses. Studies such as Rahn et al., have shown that in the likely event of the occurrence of hazards, warning messages

can help prevent or mitigate various forms of damages by communicating risks, giving information, and recommending protective actions (see Markwart et al., 2019; Rahn et al., 2020). Although modern technology such as smart cellular phones facilitates the communication of warning messages, not every resident in a transitional home has access to cell phones or possesses the know-how to install the necessary applications. Well-trained and prepared staff need to communicate these messages in a most centralized and effective manner (e.g., via a public address system), to ensure each resident gets consistent messaging at the same time.

Han et al. (2016) introduced the element of trust in analyzing risk perception by affirming that trust was one of the most important determinants of risk perception. The authors contended that the public's perceived risk and benefits are more possibly influenced by trust especially when they have limited time and knowledge to evaluate the particular risk or disaster event. At such times, people need to have reliable information from sources they can trust. This view is supported by Ye and Lyu (2020) who used a social perspective lens to analyze and conclude that trust plays an important role in shaping people's risk perception toward hazards. Odiase et al. (2020) concurred, positing that trusted sources of information and scientific opinion may influence judgment on the riskiness of certain disaster situations, prompting individuals and organizations to take protective measures to mitigate the consequences. For instance, public health threats, such as the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic may be as frightening to transitional housing staff with very little understanding of the dynamics, spread, management, and/or containment measures, as they are to the public. In such situations, an information void,

or sometimes disjointed or inaccurate supply of information, may be a potential major determinant of risk and ultimately shape staff perception of the risks associated with their roles in such an emergency (Barnett et al., 2005). As a result, transitional house staff might hesitate to respond in the face of doubts regarding their safety and/or ability to adequately carry out their duties in a disaster situation.

Cori et al. (2020) applied RPT in analyzing peoples' decisions and behaviors when exposed to environmental pressures such as Covid-19 pandemic or other kinds of disasters, highlighting the element of fear in the whole process. According to the authors, individuals act differently depending on their perception of risks. For instance, while certain individuals adhere to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines as a way of combating the spread of the virus, others ignore the guidelines often with negative consequences. Thus, the authors concluded that the fear and perception of risk can serve as a useful tool in promoting increased preparedness and better response.

Other scholars such as Akbar et al., (2020) have attributed the perception of the risk of danger as the single most important element that drives disaster preparedness. Defining risk perception as the "subjective judgments about the likelihood of the occurrence of certain types of events and peoples' concern about the negative consequences therefrom" (p. 3), the authors identified personal experience and knowledge of disasters as indicative of the accuracy of risk perception and concluded that a significant positive influence exists between disaster risk perception and disaster preparedness.

In a similar study, Osorio-de-Castro et al. (2020) used RPT to demonstrate that knowledge or awareness, perception of risk, as well as consequences, are variables that must be considered in any serious preparation towards disaster response within any vulnerable population. Findings from the study suggest that these variables play an important part in staff preparedness to respond to a disaster at the transitional houses, being a vulnerable population setting. In other words, staff of transitional houses must be knowledgeable of the hazards, perceived risks, as well as consequences of their actions or inactions to feel prepared to confront challenges posed by disasters at their facilities, and hence these variables, drive preparedness efforts.

Risk perception is known to be threat-specific in that it is often associated with particular threats, such as natural disasters. Ferrer and Klein (2015) used risk perception and possible consequences to demonstrate the need to change behaviors, arguing that in addition to being threat-specific, risk perceptions are often influenced by the frequency with which the threat is represented and by whom. Rahm and Reddick (2011) took a similar stance when they contended that the perception of risk can derive from self-protective behavior. It is believed that high levels of perceived risk can be associated with increased preparedness efforts, hence risk perception is seen as central to and a normal part of emergency management, disaster planning, and management (Kammerbauer & Minnery, 2019; Saaroni, 2015).

Shah et al. (2018) published similar opinions. They established a strong link between perceived risk and preparedness, contending that the experience of disaster can play an essential role in increasing preparedness efforts. This contention leads one to assume that

in the transitional house setting, staff who have experienced disaster in some form or shape, are more likely to be better prepared to handle disaster response. It is the need to ensure that staff at the transitional houses are equipped with the proper knowledge and skillset to undertake emergency operations, that compelled a study which aimed at enabling a better understanding of disaster preparedness in transitional houses.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts in the Study

Literature relating to the study was exhaustively reviewed and presented in the following segments. In a study entitled "Disaster preparedness as a social control", Baker and Ludwig (2016) viewed disaster preparedness as a societal problem and concluded that the predominant emergency management perspective suggested that people are best equipped to respond to disaster situations through practices of preparedness, a condition precedent for successful, orderly, and efficient response. Gin et al. (2019) on the other hand, suggested that nonprofit homeless service providers are often inadequately prepared for disasters, advocating the need for such organizations to engage in comprehensive planning and training in advance of disasters. This injunction no doubt extends to transitional houses.

In a separate contribution, Gin et al. (2016) discussed the challenges of disaster preparedness within the homeless community such as transitional houses, concluding that comprehensive disaster readiness is critical and must include having disaster plans, establishing relationships with other vital agencies, and embarking on training and exercises. Samimian-Darash and Nir Totem (2019) took a similar stance, positing that disaster preparedness had shifted from a process characterized by crisis response based

on an initial militaristic paradigm to one that focuses on emergency

management/intervention, and considered disaster preparedness as rituals of which

practice and repetition are integral components.

Hsieh and Hamilton (2016) put this in context effectively making the case for the

lack of preparedness in transitional houses. The authors opined that most transitional

housing facilities were run by private contractors who might not be obligated to follow

any emergency preparedness protocol, thus attributing variations and inadequacies in

emergency preparedness to this factor. Lastly, but by no means the least, Settembrino

(2017) highlighted unequal exposure and social stigma as part of the causes of

vulnerability among the homeless population, including those in transitional houses,

adding that these groups of people were more likely to be injured or killed during

disaster.

The foregoing highlighted some of the various perspectives through which

previous scholars had viewed disaster preparedness, underscoring the lack of focus on

transitional houses and the need for such study.

Historical Evolution of Emergency Management in the United States

Emergency management is defined as the managerial function charged with

creating the framework within which communities reduce vulnerability to hazards and

cope with disasters (McEntire, 2018; Godfrey et al., 2019). It deals with the identification

and analysis of public hazards, the mitigation of and preparedness for public risk, and the

coordination of resources in response to and recovery from associated emergency events

(Bullock et al., 2015). As a discipline, emergency management could be described as the

discipline and profession of applying science, technology, planning, and management to deal with extreme events that can injure or kill great numbers of people, do extensive property damage and disrupt community life (Sylves, 2019).

Emergency management traces its origin to as far back as the beginning of civilization when there arose the need to address calamitous events at certain periods of time, with the intention of mitigating against such occurrences or reducing the vulnerability of particular cities. Since then, every historical timeline has been marked with further development in the management of disasters-emergency management, which expands and contracts in response to events, congressional desires, and leadership styles (Haddow et al., 2017). For this reason, understanding the history and evolution, as well as the dynamics of emergency management is important as the concept has been applied differently at different times.

Historical evidence suggests that the first involvement of the federal government in local emergency management took place in 1803 with the passage of a congressional Act that provided financial relief for Portsmouth New Hampshire devastated by fire (Bullock et al., 2015; Haddow et al., 2017). Following President Franklin Roosevelt's use of government as a tool to revitalize the local economy after a disaster, emergency management function began to witness a significant governmental influence. Thus, in the 1930s, two agencies-the Reconstruction Finance Corporation [RFC] and the Bureau of Public Roads [BPR], were created and empowered to make disaster loans available for repair and reconstruction of public facilities (Haddow et al.). This period also saw the emergence of the Tennessee Valley Authority [TVA], established for the purpose of

reducing flood damage caused by flooding in the region (Haddow et al.). The Flood Control Act of 1936 was a significant piece of legislation that gave a strong fillip to the practice of emergency management in the sense that it provided the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the authority to construct flood-control projects such as bridges and levees.

The cold war period (1947-1979) witnessed the emergence of civil defense programs across various communities. In anticipation of a possible nuclear fallout, occasioned by a stand-off between the two superpowers -notably the Soviet Union and the United States, individuals and communities were encouraged to build bomb shelters to protect themselves and their families from nuclear attack from the Soviet Union (Haddow et al., 2017; Sylves, 2019). Thus, the local and state civil defense coordinators became the first recognized face of emergency management in the United States, as a civil defense against nuclear attacks became a principal focus of U.S. disaster management (Sylves). With the establishment of the Federal Civil Defense Administration [FCDA] in 1950, whose primary responsibility included facilitating, planning, coordinating, and the provision of financial assistance to states and the development of plans for evacuations and shelter (Drabek & Hoetmer, 1991), the activities of the local civil defense programs began to attract federal government support. A corollary department, the Department of Defense [DoD] was later created for the purpose of not only stockpiling essential materials in the event of a war but also, and for the first time, included emergency preparedness [emphasis added] as a function (Haddow et al., 2017).

The 1960s witnessed a remarkable shift in the evolution of emergency management and emergency preparedness. Following the effects of the natural disasters of the 1960s, President Kennedy in 1961, created the office of Emergency Preparedness to deal with natural disasters (Bullock et al., 2015; Haddow et al., 2017; Sylves, 2019). Even so, the responses to natural disasters continued on an *ad hoc* basis until the passage of the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968, which led to the creation of the National Flood Insurance Program [NFIP], a bill that brought the concept of community-based mitigation into the practice of emergency management (Haddow et al.).

The quest for a more national focus on emergency management in the 1970s led to the incorporation of the military as an integral part of the emergency management system. Thus, the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency [for nuclear attack] and the Army Corps of Engineers [Flood control], became part of the emergency management system (Haddow et al.). The need for, but lack of a central coordinating agency and the attendant confusion, especially in the wake of the 3-mile island nuclear power plant accident, as well as the response of the federal government, brought to the fore, the compelling need for the centralization of emergency response during disasters. This realization gave rise to the establishment of FEMA by President Jimmy Carter on March 31, 1979, to among other things, consolidate emergency preparedness, mitigation, and response activities into one federal agency (Haddow et al.), with the responsibility for mobilizing federal resources, coordinating efforts with states, local governments, public and private sectors (Sylves, 2019).

The 1980s saw a noticeable shift in both functions and priorities of FEMA, from the management of natural hazards to a focus on nuclear attack preparedness (Haddow et al., 2017). This shift was informed in part, by the lack of any serious natural disaster within the period, coupled with the desire of the government to elevate its national security responsibilities by realigning resources and creating additional budget authority. Faced with numerous challenges including dwindling profile and resources, FEMA was a troubled agency, suffering from morale and leadership problems as well as conflict with partners and other stakeholders (Haddow et al.). This malaise later manifested FEMA's demonstrable unpreparedness in dealing with series of natural disasters that hit the nation in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including Hurricane Hugo, described as the worst in a decade and which affected the Carolinas, resulting in economic damages estimated at about $15 billion with 85 deaths (Haddow et al.).

These disasters and the agency's inability to deal with them, prompted calls in some quarters for complete abolishing of the agency and its replacement with one, better prepared and equipped to deal with the increasing occurrence of natural disasters in the nation. President Clinton later threw a lifeline to the fledgling agency when he appointed James Lee Watt, a seasoned administrator with proven emergency management experience, to head the organization. Watt's reforms, reorganization, and restructuring increased morale, restored trust, and ultimately repositioned FEMA to respond to disasters of the 1990s, including the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993 and the Oklahoma City Bombing of 1995- two disasters that signaled a new phase in the evolution of emergency management (Haddow et al.).

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks brought the most significant changes in the evolution of emergency management. The panic, anxiety, and urgent need to quickly calm nerves, reassure Americans and prevent another 9/11-style attack, compelled the pulling together on September 20, 2001, of about 22 hitherto separate agencies, from over 100 bureaux and subagencies, with about 180,000 employees under one behemoth of an agency-the Department of Homeland Security [DHS] (Bullock et al., 2015; Sylves, 2019). With this merger, FEMA, which had hitherto been the main government agency responsible for emergency management, effectively became part of DHS which now assumed total responsibility, dealing directly with the states affected by disasters. As a result, it became difficult for the agency to maintain a high profile in the White House owing to the fact that it was now part of a department with nearly 220,000 federal employees under a cabinet secretary (Sylves, 2019).

The FEMA-DHS fusion had certain implications positively and negatively, for the evolution of emergency management. For one, bringing FEMA under the DHS umbrella, created a huge disaster management agency with access to larger resources human, financial, and material. It elevated most disasters to national status making the deployment of federal resources to affected areas easier and quicker (Haddow et al., 2017). Thus, DHS gave FEMA greater capacity to deal with disasters and through the establishment of local DHS offices in the states and local government, brought emergency management nearer home.

Conversely, forcing FEMA to become part of DHS deprived the former of its preeminent position as a cabinet-level agency with a direct reporting line to the president.

This 'demotion' further stripped FEMA of some of its most capable personnel as most were reassigned to DHS (Sylves, 2019). This weakening of FEMA greatly impacted its ability to effectively perform its original function which is to plan, prepare, and respond to disasters in a way that functionally coordinates, or helps to coordinate the provision of federal resources (Sylves). Perhaps, the most significant negative impact was the diversion or refocusing of attention to mainly terrorism matters, instead of the broader national emergencies including national disasters. This error in judgment was to become the nemesis that was the handling of Hurricane Katrina. Bullock et al. (2015) suggested that with the change brought about by the fusion of FEMA into DHS, many, if not all of the grant programs established within the new DHS focused on terrorism.

FEMA programs and funding were diverted or reduced to support terrorism. This decision by the leadership of DHS to focus on terrorism at the expense of other threats, and to diminish the role of FEMA, led directly to the horrible events and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. It further resulted in criticisms leveled against it from various stakeholders and the belief that focus on terrorism had been maintained at the expense of preparedness and response capacity for other hazards. It was the need to correct this anomaly and plug some of the gaping holes exposed by the failures of Katrina response, that led to the passing of the Post Katrina Emergency Management Response Act (PKEMRA) of 2006, an act that arguably had the most far-reaching impact on FEMA.

PKEMRA reorganized FEMA, expanding its statutory authority, and imposed new conditions and requirements on its operations. For instance, PKEMRA authorized DHS to consolidate all emergency management functions including preparedness, into

FEMA, prevent the reassignment of FEMA's assets, and ensured organizational autonomy, including setting up of 10 regional offices while requiring its administrators to report all emergency management related matters to congress upon consultation with DHS secretary (Congressional Research Services [CRS], 2007); Haddow et al., 2017). With FEMA's enhanced autonomy and elevated status, including reporting line, the emergency management focus was once again not only re-established, the trajectory now included an all-hazard approach as the new leadership instituted changes including encouraging close partnerships and/or collaboration between the states and local governments. Finally, PKEMRA made compliance with the National Incidents Management System (NIMS), a condition for continued funding from the federal government (Haddow et al., 2017).

Phases of Emergency Management

Emergency management is defined as the managerial function charged with creating the framework within which communities reduce vulnerability to hazards and cope with disasters (McEntire, 2018; Tucker, 2014). Simply put, it is a discipline that deals with risks and risk avoidance (Haddow et al., 2017). Emergency management involves full integration of emergency plans at all levels of an organization (DHS, 2017). From a governmental standpoint, however, emergency management deals with hazardous situations that cause business outages hence it is a process that allows qualified personnel to plan and prepare for identified hazards and risks to the community and coordinate the response and recovery therefrom (Tucker, 2014).

Scholars and practitioners have identified four phases of emergency management, and these include Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Recovery (DHS, 2017; Tucker, 2014; Sylves, 2019; Haddow et al., 2017). These phases will be discussed in greater detail.

Mitigation

This is a sustained action to reduce or eliminate the risk to people and property from hazards and their effects (Sylves, 2019; Haddow et al., 2017), and takes a long-term approach to reduce risks. According to FEMA (2012), mitigation signifies those actions-including threat and vulnerability assessments- often permanent, taken to reduce the probability of or potential loss from hazard events. Mitigation is a critical component of emergency management, the goal of which is to provide strategies for reducing either the likelihood or consequences of disasters that may affect an organization when they occur (Haddow et al., 2017).

Preparedness

According to Sylves (2019), preparedness entails the development of a response plan and training first responders to save lives and keep disaster damage to a minimum. In other words, preparedness implies readying for expected threats including contingency planning, resource management, and mutual aids, hence Haddow et al. (2017) described it as a state of readiness to respond to a disaster, crisis, or any other type of emergency situation. Preparedness includes all actions taken prior to a disaster event, to be ready to respond to it and manage the consequences (Marcino & Gordon, 2018). Preparedness, therefore, is a continuous cycle of planning, organizing, training, equipping, evaluating,

and taking corrective action, to ensure effective coordination capable of enhancing

capabilities that help to prevent, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate

the effects of disasters, natural or man-made (Baker & Ludwig, 2016; Essoh & Owoicho-

Abutu, 2018; Rotich, 2019; Godfrey et al., 2019). Preparedness seeks to improve the

abilities of agencies and individuals to respond to the consequences of a disaster event

once it has occurred, hence it assumes the occurrence of an event (Haddow et al., 2017).

This phase constitutes the main thrust of this study and was discussed in greater detail

later in this chapter.

Response

This is the immediate reaction to an emergency situation to save lives, protect

property, and meet basic human needs (McEntire, 2018; Haddow et al.,2017). Response

entails providing emergency aid and assistance, reducing the probability of secondary

damage, and minimizing problems for recovery operations (Sylves, 2019). In most

disaster situations, the response phase involves search, rescue, and provision of basic

needs of those affected by the disaster event. Therefore, effective coordination of

assistance to those affected by the disaster is often crucial especially when multiple

jurisdictions are involved, and the capacity of the local resources is overwhelmed.

Recovery

This entails decisions and actions that relate to rebuilding homes, replacing

property, resuming employment, restoring or reopening businesses, and rebuilding

damaged infrastructure (Haddow et al., 2017). Recovery is arguably the most expensive

phase in the disaster cycle as it involves actions aimed at returning the affected

community to normalcy, hence decisions at this phase are fundamentally made at the local level of government (Sylves, 2019). Typically, the recovery phase is not time-limited and can last for as long as it takes to return the affected area to its pre-disaster status and/or reduce the threat of future disaster (FEMA, 2012). For this reason, recovery is generally the last phase of emergency management and usually starts immediately following the reduction of the threat to human life and property (DHS, 2017). These phases, constitute the main planks or issues in emergency management of which preparedness is a major component.

<center>**Transitional Housing**</center>

Transitional housing as a concept is not an entirely novel idea. Sir Walter Crofton first broached the idea as a means of providing some skills, intellect, and work ethic, to inmates in Irish prisons who hitherto lacked these virtues (McGowan, 2016). The concept however was introduced in the United States in about 1817, when the Massachusetts prison commission borrowed the idea as a method of combating high recidivism rates, though it did not receive the blessing of lawmakers then (McGowan, 2016). The idea continued to be experimented on, mainly by religious groups such as the Quakers until about a century later. The emergence of Robert Kennedy as Attorney General in 1961 provided a platform that helped popularize the concept when he described pre-release guidance centers as a proven way to groom and mentor juvenile offenders for lawful life (Portman, 2016; McGowan, 2016).

The Federal Prisoner Rehabilitation Act of 1965 gave a strong boost to the emerging popularity and acceptance of the concept when it authorized the establishment

of Halfway houses for adults and juveniles (McGowan, 2016). Although the sentencing

laws of the 1970s and 1980s, with their emphasis on tough on crime and war on drugs,

appeared to have affected the spread of transitional or Halfway houses, the concept

nonetheless continued till date. For instance, the Department of Justice [DoJ], reported

that in 2013, about 30,000 federal inmates passed through transitional houses (DoJ, 2013,

as cited in Portman, 2016). This leads one to conclude that transitional houses are here to

stay.

Structure and Organization

Transitional houses can be defined as residences for people who otherwise, would

be incarcerated in jail or prison (Portman, 2016). Transitional houses have been severally

described as "Community Correction Centers", "Residential Reentry Centers", or

"Halfway Houses" (McGowan, 2016). Regardless of the terminology, the concept

remains the same. Transitional houses provide consistent shelter and support that allow

residents to redirect their energies toward acquiring long-term skills and tools needed to

move toward self-sufficiency (Gin et al., 2019). Scholars generally agree that transitional

houses can be categorized into three main types according to what functions they serve

viz: (a) centers that deal on mental health recovery, (b) those that concentrate on

substance abuse addiction, and (c) facilities that focus on providing temporary shelter to

ex-offenders and attempt to reintegrate them into the society (Hsieh & Hamilton, 2016;

McGowan, 2016). This study focused on the last category.

As facilities used to provide treatment or rehabilitate previously incarcerated

persons, transitional houses are often privately managed, leading to variations,

inconsistencies, and inadequacies in types of services and levels of preparedness for emergency response (Hsieh & Hamilton, 2016). The Texas department of criminal justice [tdcj], which constitutes the centerpiece of this study, contracts with these private facilities to provide residential services to its clientele. It was not known if these private contractors applied required disaster preparedness principles in the management of their facilities during disasters. This fact was of interest to this study.

Disaster Preparedness in Transitional Houses

The terms disaster preparedness and emergency preparedness have been used interchangeably in emergency management (Gebbie & Qureshi, 2002, as cited in Ruder, 2012). Both terms refer to the measures taken prior to an event that lessens or help mitigate and eliminate the severity of a natural disaster, by preparing the population through the development of emergency plans for response and recovery, translation of these plans quickly and effectively, and continuous public awareness regarding hazards and risks (Rañeses et al., 2018).

The authors contended that different nations define the concept differently according to their perceptions. For instance, Japan describes disaster preparedness as the capacities and knowledge developed by governments, organizations, communities, and individuals, to anticipate and respond effectively to the impact of likely imminent or current hazard events or conditions (Rañeses et al.). In New Zealand, it is the process of developing the operational systems and capabilities before an emergency happens, including making arrangements with emergency services, lifeline utilities, and other

agencies, etc., while in the United States, it is simply a state of readiness to respond to a disaster, crisis, or any other type of emergency situation (Rañeses et al.).

Regardless of how it is defined, the common theme is the readiness to respond in the face of a disaster. This is because the more prepared a community, the better equipped it is to deal with disaster and its impact (Hashemipour et al. 2017). In separate studies by McNeil et al. (2018) and Akbar et al. (2020), the authors found a direct relationship between preparedness, vulnerability, and resilience. According to these authors, as the level of preparedness increases, the vulnerability of the community decreases while its resilience increases. Hashemipour et al. (2017) took a similar stance when they asserted that a community's resilience is dependent on the disaster's disruption level and the community's level of preparedness. In their view, if communities are equipped, involved, and trained to tackle disaster events, they exhibit greater resilience during disastrous events and thus are less vulnerable.

Essoh and Abutu (2018) thus concluded that preparedness is proactive rather than reactive, with its basic tenet being the anticipation of events prior to occurrence and taking steps to mitigate their impact once they occur. Matunhay (2019) concurred, adding that an adequate level of preparedness can be particularly essential to saving lives in the face of disasters, a fact borne out by the seeming unpreparedness by Americans to face the Covid-19 pandemic and consequently the staggering number of lives so far lost as a result (800,000 +). All this points to efficient planning which is a very critical component of disaster preparedness.

Planning

Emergency planning and disaster planning are often used complimentarily and defined as the process of preparing systematically for future contingencies including major incidents or disasters (Alexander, 2015). It involves a coordinated, cooperative process of preparing to match urgent needs with available resources. Planning is arguably one of the most important steps in emergency preparedness and often begins with the identification of the disaster incident and the hazards risk assessment during which all applicable hazards are identified and prioritized (Haddow et al., 2017). According to the National Incident Management Systems (NIMS), planning is the operational core of preparedness and provides mechanisms for setting priorities, integrating multiple jurisdictions/organizations and functions, establishing collaborative relationships, and ensuring that communications and other systems effectively support the full spectrum of emergency management incident response activities (DHS, 2017).

It is essential that planning addresses training and exercises and allows for the incorporation of after-action reviews, lessons learned, and corrective actions taken. In short, planning should describe how personnel, equipment, and other governmental (and nongovernmental) resources can be used to support emergency management preparedness and response. Anelli (2006) cautioned that it is the planning and not the plan that matters hence having a plan without the input and commitment of those who will execute it is considered a waste of time. For this reason, Alexander (2015) suggested that planning should be a collective responsibility and a participatory process, requiring experience and training.

Training and Exercise

According to Haddow et al. (2017), training of emergency response personnel is paramount to their ability to conduct the tasks required of them. Training is a vital component of community preparedness as it helps all those involved in response and recovery to anticipate what could happen and how best to react (Mc Entire, 2018). Preparedness includes drills and exercises carried out periodically to reduce complacency (Godfrey et al., 2019). This is true due to the tendency to deprioritize training and exercise especially during extended periods of inactivity. Therefore, reviewing the plan or having a practice drill periodically, will improve the process in the event of an emergency (LeBlanc et al., 2019; Nofal et al., 2018). In a study conducted by Marcino and Gordon (2018), the authors contended that having an extensive reservoir of trained personnel is beneficial to an organization as it signifies the availability of well-trained and experienced staff to draw from in times of disaster.

Kapucu et al. (2017) suggested that consistent training and exercise are necessary and must direct focus on improving coordination and communication. According to the authors, planning and procedure creation is helpful, but authorities cannot evaluate its effectiveness without testing and exercise, hence being able to engage in training and exercises helps to understand strengths, resource capacity, the functionality of equipment, and areas of improvement (DHS, 2017). Sutton and Tierney (2006) posited that preparedness ensures both the availability of resources to effectively respond to disaster events, as well as the ability to put those resources into use, a function of training and exercise. In their view, a good preparedness portfolio should entail developing a planning

process to ensure readiness, stockpiling resources necessary for effective response, and developing skills and competencies to ensure effective deployment of the resources when the need arises.

FEMA (2008b) identified training and qualification as critical to emergency management, suggesting that an emergency response requires adequately trained personnel with the knowledge and skills necessary to perform their task. In their contribution on the importance of training and exercises in emergency response, Peleg et al. (2018) introduced a psychological dimension to the discourse. The authors pointed out that training has an equalizing effect on trainees which results in high levels of performance, teamwork, and bonding following training. This teamwork instills in a group, a sense of togetherness which serves as a glue that holds the team together during a crisis. Samimian-Darash and Rotem (2018) not only concurred with the above, they added that the repetition that characterizes exercises becomes a habit-building, just as Beckett (2013), as cited in Samimian-Darash & Rotem (2018), asserted that practice and repetition are key to the inculcation of these procedures, making them a kind of "habitus."

Lack of training has been found to be very inimical to emergency preparedness and response. Scholars such as Kirkpatrick & Bryan (2007) attributed part of the reasons for failure during Hurricane Katrina, to the uneven provision of training to staff by some agencies. The authors found out that whereas certain agencies offered routine and comprehensive training preparatory to hurricane emergencies, others did not provide any training, or where they did, they did so in a haphazard manner. Yet, others such as Rivera

(2019) put it more succinctly, contending that FEMA was not fully prepared to address

the catastrophe that was the 2017 hurricane in Puerto Rico. In another instance, the author

posited that the impact of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma did affect the ability of FEMA to

be properly prepared for Hurricane Maria. The author argued that FEMA faced staffing

challenges, forcing the agency to implement innovative methods to augment the disaster

workforce.

Improvisation, while serving some purpose especially during critical or

emergency periods, cannot substitute for planning and preparedness, including training

and exercise. Adopting an impromptu or extemporaneous approach to emergency

response in any organization such as transitional houses can be counterproductive and

must be avoided, if necessary. For, as Alexander (2015) pointed out, failure to plan can

be construed as negligence because it would imply failure to anticipate needs that cannot

be responded to adequately by improvisation during an emergency. Therefore, neglecting

to train and exercise, while it may save cost in the short term, could prove costly or lead

to higher expenditures in the long term, especially if agencies fail to adequately respond

to the real-world events (Williams, 2011). NIMS Training Program helps to mitigate risk

by achieving greater preparedness. The following training programs shown in Table 1 are

recommended for emergency response operators:

Table 1

Recommended Training Program for Emergency Responders

Course Name/No	Course Description
IS-100.b - (ICS 100)	Introduction to Incident Command System
IS-200.b (ICS 200)	ICS for Single Resources and Initial Action Incidents
IS-700.a	National Incident Management System (NIMS), An Introduction
IS-702.a	National Incident Management System (NIMS) Public Information Systems
IS-703.a	NIMS Resource Management Course
IS-706 NIMS	Intrastate Mutual Aid - An Introduction
IS-800.b	National Response Framework, An Introduction (FEMA, 2018)

Note. This table highlights the recommended training courses and descriptions.

These training programs have been seen to help sharpen staff focus and strengthen their preparedness to undertake emergency response, hence the recommendation for all persons engaged in emergency response operations to undertake them.

It seems clear therefore from the foregoing, that the best practice is to encourage planning and conduct periodic training and exercises among the staff of transitional houses in order to ensure their readiness to deal with emergency situations when they arise.

Role of Communication in Disaster Preparedness

Communication plays a critical role in emergency management and response operations. Effective emergency response relies heavily on flexible but dependable information management. Establishing and maintaining a common operating channel and ensuring accessibility and interoperability are necessary and must form the goal of

information management during a disaster (DHS, 2017). The role of communication in the dissemination of knowledge regarding preparedness measures during disasters, is gaining importance, the goal being to sensitize local communities on how to prepare for and deal with such disasters (Giri & Vats, 2018). This role, especially its authenticity and reliability, has become even more crucial these days with the prevalence of social media. A case in point is the current pandemic vis-à-vis the role the media has played in creating awareness and disseminating information regarding precautionary measures that people must take to stay uninfected. Juxtapose that with the initial inaccurate information or the lack thereof, evidenced in the downplaying of the severity and spread of the virus, the picture becomes clearer, especially in terms of its effect on preparedness.

It is important to note that part of the challenge for increasing preparedness in individuals, communities, and organizations, is to ensure the nature of the threat is well communicated as people are more likely to prepare if the information is accurate and comes from a reliable source (Kanakis & McShane, 2016; Rahn et al., 2020). Social media has thus become an indispensable element in disaster and crisis communication as the public has integrated it into their lives, hence emergency planners can no longer ignore or keep it out of disaster planning (Haddow et al., 2017). Instead, planners can leverage social media to warn people, collect information from the field, manage responses, answer questions from the worried public, and devise new ways of managing the emergency (Alexander, 2015; Rahn et al., 2020). In a community such as the transitional houses where not everyone has access to smartphones, staff must adopt other methods to promptly and accurately disseminate information so that residents get

consistent messages during disaster events. This is important because as Shah et al.

(2018) suggested, communication is always challenging during an emergency situation,

and important for a two-way sharing of information to ensure timely and appropriate

responses.

Funding Factor in Disaster Preparedness

Funding plays a very significant part in emergency or disaster preparedness.

Nearly all phases of emergency management are impacted by funding availability or

constraints. In the realms of mitigation and recovery, funding is particularly important

and greatly impacts the success of those phases. Sylves (2019) described recovery as the

most expensive phase of the disaster cycle. This is so because this phase involves

restoration, rebuilding, and efforts to return to normalcy. According to Haddow et al.

(2017), effective recovery aims at bringing the various stakeholders together to plan,

finance, and implement a recovery strategy that aims at rebuilding the affected area. This

effort could be greatly enhanced by the availability of funding or impaired by a lack of it.

Mitigation, on the other hand, has equally been described as a very important and no less

expensive phase, hence some scholars describe this phase as the most expensive.

As a sustained action that helps reduce or eliminate risk to people and property

from hazards and their effect (Haddow et al., 2017; Sylves, 2019), mitigation is a very

expensive process. Earlier in the course of the pandemic, the United States Congress

passed legislation approving a 2 trillion-dollar stimulus package to help Americans

cushion the effect of the current coronavirus pandemic. This was the third in a series of

stimulus packages and at the time of writing, the fourth, a 1.5 trillion package was in the

works. The significance of these huge stimulus packages is the desire of the government

to reduce or mitigate the impact of the pandemic since, as most scholars of emergency

management would agree, mitigation costs money. It is important to note that the United

States could spend this much partly because there is money-it is, after all, the richest

country in the world, and partly because it is at peace. It is obvious that priorities could

have shifted were it involved in say, costly war with a foreign adversary.

Although the above analogy reflects the big picture, the story is similar at the

state, local government, or tribal level. How much a community or an organization such

as a transitional house is able to mitigate when disaster strikes, is often a function of the

availability of funds. States and local governments typically face limits on their capacity

to issue debt to finance projects including emergency management operations (Mikesell,

2014).

Role of Private Sector

The private sector makes an important contribution to disaster preparedness and

emergency response operations. Its role finds expression in such areas as the provision of

logistic support especially, to help during recovery exercises. Haddow et al. (2017)

observed that much of the equipment needed to protect citizens and responders come

from the private sector. The huge financial outlay involved in the procurement of such

equipment is often very inhibitive and compels communities and organizations to rely on

public-private partnerships. Bajracharya and Hastings (2015) described these partnerships

as contractual arrangements between governments and the private sector that support the

governments' broader service responsibilities. Tucker (2014) suggested that a symbiotic

relationship developed between private businesses and government by which the former

benefit from real-time situational information during emergencies, while government

enjoys access to the former's financial war chest. According to the author, September 11

and Hurricane Katrina made it no longer a question of whether the private sector had a

role to play in national security and disaster management, but what that role should be.

In a recent study conducted by Besiou and Wassenhove (2020), the authors

reported that the scarcity of resources had resulted in a call by the UN, for an increased

private sector involvement in emergency response operations. Further, the authors

suggested that although reduced funding calls for careful prioritization and cost-

effectiveness, effort should be made not to let that stand in the way of equity and other

ethical considerations. Transitional houses thus can find ready and willing partners within

the private sector as establishments such as Walmart, some construction companies, and

others, may stand ready to partner with them to facilitate preparedness. Such partnerships

may be inevitable as a means of alleviating funding constraints. The importance of

partnership was discussed further in this chapter.

Transitional Housing, Homelessness, and Disaster Preparedness

It is normal for scholars to describe transitional housing as synonymous with

homelessness. Studies abound with such comparisons which often paint the picture of a

similarity. The logic here seems to be that residents of transitional houses are *ipso facto*,

homeless, at least for the period they reside at those houses. Transitional housing

facilities are run by private agencies (Hsieh & Hamilton, 2016; Gin et al., 2019). These

agencies are considered second circle organizations whose emergency response approach

is secondary to their core mission (Hambridge et al., 2017). A transitional house in Texas that fits this structure, i.e., run by a private agency, was considered for this study.

According to Gin et al. (2019), the homeless population includes persons living in transitional housing or emergency shelters. These individuals face barriers such as limited resources, extreme poverty, social stigma, and marginalization, which cause them to be denied access to shelters designated for disaster victims and hence, their preparedness during a disaster (Gin et al., 2019; Settembrino, 2017). In their submission, Moloko-Phiri et al. (2017) argued that some countries consider shelters as part of transitional housing programs viewed by organizations as bridging or transitional measures between emergency and permanent housing. This description clearly fits into the concept of establishing transitional houses as facilities that provide temporary shelter to previously incarcerated persons learning to reengage with society (McGowan, 2016).

Gin et al. (2019) contended that homeless service providers are often inadequately prepared for disasters and lack continuity of operations plans to enable them quickly respond after the disruption caused by a disaster. This is perhaps due to the social stigmatization attached to or associated with their status, which often places them at the lowest category in terms of prioritization. As a result, they often experience devastating challenges during disasters due to their inability to prepare and the lack of resources for recovery (Brown et al., 2013; Doran et al., 2016, as cited in Gin et al., 2019). Therefore, it is logical to conclude that any consideration in terms of disaster preparedness, given to the homeless shelters, invariably applies to transitional houses as well.

Texas Emergency Preparedness

Following the directive of HSPD-5 under which NIMS was established and its compliance made a precondition for the allocation of federal preparedness funds, every state government officially adopted NIMS through executive order or other policy mechanisms (Hambridge et al., 2017). Consequently, on February 23, 2005, then Governor of Texas, Rick Perry, issued executive order RP40 which compelled the state of Texas to adopt NIMS for incident management (Texas Department of Public Safety [TDPS], 2013). This order ensured the application of NIMS protocol in all aspects of emergency management operations in the state by all agencies and organizations.

The Texas division of emergency management (TDEM) serves the state by managing the all-hazards emergency management plans, working closely with local jurisdictions and state agencies, and federal partners in ensuring citizens and communities become resilient for future disasters (tdem.texas.gov).

The office of Emergency Management (OEM) is the central oversight authority for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) emergency management preparedness and response (tdcj.texas.gov). Part of its responsibilities includes coordinating with groups and agencies under TDCJ, to develop and update emergency response plans, including training of agency staff on emergency preparedness consistent with the Incident Command System (ICS) and NIMS. (tdcj.texas.gov). Thus, transitional houses which are divisions or sub-units of TDCJ, by their very structure and composition, fall within the oversight structure of OEM and by extension, TDEM.

Collaboration, Coordination, and Partnerships

Agencies have traditionally found the need to collaborate in emergency management by pulling resources together to tackle disasters. As noted by Nohrstedt (2016), collaboration is a necessary condition for effective response to crises, emergencies, and disasters. Under this arrangement, each participating agency or stakeholder contributes its expertise to the common goal, which goal would have been difficult if pursued separately- an arrangement described as a collaborative advantage (Bryson, 2011). Nohrstedt et al. (2018) put it more succinctly, describing collaboration as the process of facilitating and operating in multi-organizational arrangements to solve problems that cannot be solved or easily solved by single organizations, an arrangement that is often based on the value of reciprocity.

Whether in the case of inter-organizational or intra-organizational collaboration, Bryson (2011) suggested that collaboration is particularly useful when addressing problems for which none of the participating entities is fully in charge. Thus, irrespective of the different perspectives of each interest group, the positive effect of shared responsibility and collaborative efforts or pooled resources, in the end, outweighs whatever concerns there may be. This scenario clearly fits disaster response operations especially in transitional houses which often require collaborative efforts of related agencies to manage. Nohrstedt et al., (2018) contended that collaboration in crisis or disaster management involves regular interactions among diverse stakeholders in relation to preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery.

Coordination on the contrary entails the synchronization and integration of activities, responsibilities, and command and control structures to ensure that the resources of an organization are used most efficiently in pursuit of specified goals. This is consistent with the description by DHS which suggested that coordination entails the integration of resources for optimal benefit (DHS, 2017). In the context of disaster, Curtis (2015) suggested that coordination should involve organizations that communicate clearly with each other within a defined and transparent accountability structure. Here, the author firmly places communication as an important construct within an understanding and application of effective coordination. According to the author, if coordination is to be effective, communication between organizations, which is arguably the most important factor in disaster response, must be efficient.

The role of partnerships in emergency management is crucial and can be viewed strategically either in terms of prevention and preparedness or aimed toward response and recovery operation (Bajracharya & Hastings, 2015). Partnerships between community organizations and emergency service organizations can build preparedness by adopting programs that can increase emergency response (Redshaw et al., 2017). Gamboa-Maldonado et al. (2014) seemed to agree when they suggested that while responsibility begins at the local level, preparedness requires a concerted effort- a collaboration, involving every level of government, the private sector, NGOs, and individuals. Thus, ensuring effective disaster preparedness in transitional houses would entail collaboration which will enable agencies to team up for effective response operation. Collaboration and partnerships could be achieved through some or all of the following channels.

Multiagency Collaboration:

This is a process that allows all levels of governments and agencies to work together more efficiently and effectively (DHS, 2017). Through this process, NGOs such as Red Cross, Police departments, EMS, Fire departments, Faith-based organizations as well as the private sector, all cooperate during disaster preparedness and implementation.

Mutual Aid Partnerships or Agreement

This arrangement provides a mechanism to quickly obtain emergency assistance in the form of personnel, equipment, materials and other ancillary services (DHS, 2017). Local mutual aid agreements between transitional houses and neighboring jurisdictions, counties or organizations, by which support could be received if and when requested, are highly encouraged. Godfrey et al. (2019) observed that it is important to establish mutual aid agreements with law enforcement and other first responders at the county levels to assist during emergencies especially during the preparedness phase. The authors believed that establishing mutual aid agreements, provides the opportunity for relationships to be made which in turn, will improve disaster preparedness. They concluded and rightly so, that when a face is associated with a name, the chances of receiving a response, especially during emergencies, greatly increases.

Elected and Appointed Officials

These officials, although may not be required to be physically present at the scene of an incident, should be able to communicate and coordinate support during disasters. These people play important roles including but not limited to: (i) leading and encouraging preparedness efforts within the community, agencies of jurisdiction such as

transitional houses, NGOs, and private sector (ii) very importantly, help to establish

relationships, (including mutual aid agreements) with other jurisdictions, NGOs and the

private sector as needed (iii) support and encourage participation in mitigation efforts and

(iv) maintain an understanding of basic emergency management, continuity of operations,

and initiation of disaster declarations, etc.(DHS, 2017). In view of the significant role

these officials can play during disasters, efforts must be made by operators and staff of

transitional houses, to court the friendship of these elected officials in their jurisdiction.

Volunteerism and Disaster Preparedness

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand staff emergency

preparedness in transitional houses in Texas. Earlier in the study, I had defined staff as

consisting of (a) employees of the organizations that manage the transitional houses and

(b) volunteers, including parole officers who assist in emergency response during

disasters. It is therefore important to devote the next segment to describe the significance

of these volunteers in disaster preparedness in transitional houses.

Several authors have defined volunteerism according to different perspectives,

levels of participation, contractual or professional obligations and/or

relationships. According to a definition proffered by the International Year of Volunteers

(2001), as cited in Shi, et al. (2018), a volunteer is a person, who, having carried out the

duties of every citizen, places his/her own capacity at the disposal of others, for the

community or for full humanity. They operate in a free gratuitous manner, promoting

creative and effective responses to the needs of the beneficiaries of their action and

contributing to the realization of common goods. Whittaker et al. (2015) simplified this

definition by suggesting that such activities are non-obligatory, meaning (there is no contractual, familial or friendship obligation, or coercion involved). They are undertaken for the benefit of others, society as a whole, or a specific organization, they are unpaid for, and undertaken in an organized manner. However, in the context of disasters and emergencies, volunteerism refers to all disaster responders, who are not bound by a contractual or statutory obligation, but who act out of their own free will (Albris & Lauta, 2019).

Parole Officers as Volunteers

During disasters, it is not uncommon for the nature, scale and intensity of such events to overwhelm and result in shortage of regular staff to handle the response. In other words, the emergency response needs often exceed the capacity of government agencies and professional organizations, creating a need for volunteers to step in and help (Shi, et al., 2018; Brown, 2018). At such times, volunteer workers such as parole officers, who constitute an invaluable but underutilized and largely untrained resource, may step in to augment (Brown, 2018). And whereas Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], tacitly discourages using unaffiliated volunteers (Brown, 2018), having these volunteers prepared through advance training is considered best practice.

Parole officers under the Texas Department of Criminal Justice [TDCJ], being affiliated with official agencies (Whittaker et al., 2015), constitute a significant part of the volunteer pool and fall within the category described as 'functional volunteers' i.e., those equipped with specific emergency skills to offer support during disaster events (Shi, et al., 2018). These officers are often asked to volunteer to help at the transitional houses to

address the supervision needs of resident parolees, and assist regular staff as needed, during emergency response. At issue is the level of preparedness [if any], of these volunteer staff in terms of training, to effectively assist in emergency response (Brown, 2018). Nevertheless, these and other spontaneous volunteers play a critical role during emergency situations and without their efforts, immediate response and recovery would be difficult to accomplish. It is therefore safe, to argue that because volunteers such as parole officers, provide much of the additional surge capacity required to respond to emergency disasters, their inclusion in preparedness planning and training in transitional houses is highly encouraged (Whittaker et al., 2015).

Poverty and Disaster Preparedness in Transitional Houses

Researchers have identified a relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and disaster preparedness. Some scholars have found that although Americans are generally not well prepared for disasters, those with low SES are even less prepared than others (SAMHSA, 2017). The disaster preparedness literature demonstrates that there are specific demographic groups, including elderly people and residents with disabilities, who are disproportionately at-risk during a disaster due to their socioeconomic status and other intrinsic vulnerability factors, and therefore require special attention (Shah et al., 2018). Ample evidence exists which suggests that people who are poor or economically disadvantaged are more vulnerable and often display a greater propensity to prepare for disaster. In a study on disaster preparedness, Baker and Ludwig (2016) argued that despite seeming uncertainty about why people do or do not prepare, most in vulnerable areas show minimum preparedness. Gin et al. (2018) echoed a similar viewpoint, adding

that people living in poverty or who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, including people who are homeless, are less likely to be prepared for disasters. They concluded, therefore, that increasing the disaster resilience of homeless service agencies is very vital in ensuring their preparedness to deal with disaster events.

In a study on 'Equitable Pandemic Preparedness and Rapid Response', Alberti et al. (2020) used the Covid-19 response to further demonstrate the unequal relationship between socioeconomic status (SES) and disaster preparedness. The authors argued that people in different socioeconomic circumstances such as those living in poverty, the homeless, people within the carceral system, immigrants, etc., do not have the same ability to follow CDC guidelines. With limited economic cushions such as lack of health insurance, paid sick leave, or affordable housing, these people are economically marginalized and so more vulnerable to the vagaries of disaster. Residents in transitional houses, typify these categories of vulnerable individuals hence require greater care during disasters.

The above view is consistent with the position of Fothergill and Peek (2004) as cited in SAMHSA (2017), where they concluded that people in poverty, with low incomes and less education are less prepared for disasters. Haddow et al. (2017) observed that the majority of the people who failed to leave New Orleans [during Katrina], did so because they had poor or no transportation, hence they contended that the poor were more vulnerable to disasters. The logic here is simple. Residents in transitional houses fit the classical definition of vulnerable populations. They are poor, less educated, largely unemployed, some with health issues and yet, lack health insurance and so very

vulnerable to disaster. Most, if not all, will certainly need some type of help during

disasters. This vulnerability underscores the compelling need for adequate disaster

preparedness among the staff of the facilities that house them.

Regulatory Compliance

Disaster preparedness as a component of emergency management is governed by

certain regulations that help ensure standardization and acceptable practice. This section

considers the relevance of disaster preparedness in transitional houses in North Texas, to

federal, state, and local regulations with a view to ascertaining their compliance. These

regulations include:

NIMS Compliance

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks exposed the unpreparedness of United

States to deal with major national emergencies [just as the Covid-19 has done].

Consequently, the Homeland Security Act of 2002, mandated the creation of the National

Incident Management System (NIMS) to be the standard method for managing

emergency response operations at all levels of government regardless of incident type,

size, or complexity (Hambridge et al., 2017). NIMS provides a systematic, proactive

approach to guide departments and agencies at all levels of government, NGOs, and the

private sector, to work seamlessly to prevent, protect against, respond to, recover from,

and mitigate the effects of incidents regardless of cause, size, location, or complexity, in

order to reduce the loss of life and property and harm to the environment (DHS, 2017).

NIMS compliance was made a precondition for any agency or organization to receive

homeland security preparedness funding (Sylves, 2019; Haddow et al., 2017; Jensen &

Youngs, 2014; Hambridge et al., 2017). For this reason, every state government officially

adopted NIMS through executive order or other policy mechanisms, alongside many

agencies and organizations in varying degrees (Hambridge et al.). By the same measure,

the American Correctional Association (ACA), the umbrella organization that guides all

adult correctional institutions, compelled its member associations to develop their

emergency response plans on the model provided by NIMS (ACA, 2014).

NIMS model comprises five major components, which include command and

management, preparedness, resource management, communications and information, and

management and maintenance (FEMA, 2018). This study focused on the preparedness

component.

The NIMS preparedness component is critical to effective incident management

as it encompasses all activities conducted before an incident, including planning, training

and exercises, personnel qualification, equipment acquisition and certification standards,

and evaluation and revision (FEMA, 2018). Not known is whether transitional house

staff's disaster preparedness follows NIMS established protocols. This inquiry constituted

one of the objectives of the study. Agencies or organizations such as transitional houses

fall under "second circle" agencies for whom emergency response is secondary mission

(see Hambridge et al., 2017). These organizations have many more concerns and

priorities than emergency preparedness, hence devoting personnel, funds, time, and

managerial attention – all scarce organizational resources, to emergency preparedness,

may constitute opportunity costs and thus not necessarily a priority relative to other core

mission objectives (Hambridge et al.). Yet, it is safe to conclude that to ensure an

effective and substantially integrated emergency response operation, it is imperative that both first responders and others involved in response delivery, including volunteers, be guided by NIMS.

Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief & Emergency Assistance Act

This Act was approved by congress and signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in 1988, as an amendment to the Federal Disaster Relief Act of 1974 (Haddow, et al., 2017; Sylves, 2019). The major elements of the law include reauthorizing the president to issue major disaster and emergency declarations, setting broad eligibility criteria, and specifying the type of assistance the president may authorize (Sylves, 2019). Under this framework, the act authorizes FEMA to provide financial assistance to rent alternate housing temporarily or repair or replace owner-occupied private residences (Metha, et al., 2020). This Act signifies the main legislative framework upon which disaster relief and response rest and makes emergency management interwoven with national security. The result is that although every disaster is local, disaster preparedness and response even in transitional houses, are protected to some degree under the T. Stafford Act.

PKEMRA Act

The Post Katrina Emergency Management Response Act (PKEMRA) of 2006, [Public law 109-295], arguably had the most far-reaching impact on FEMA, having evolved largely in response to failures of Katrina. PKEMRA reorganized FEMA, expanding its statutory authority, and imposed new conditions and requirements on its operations. For instance, PKEMRA authorized DHS to consolidate all emergency

management functions including preparedness, into FEMA and initiated and took a major role in providing post-disaster housing (Haddow et al., 2017). The law further compelled the remaking of the National Response Framework (NRF) which ensured that DHS/FEMA became more responsive to emergency disasters by assuming more responsibilities including mass care, an Emergency Support Function (ESF) hitherto under the jurisdiction of the Red Cross (Haddow et al.).

Rationale for Studying Residents in Transitional Houses

Considering the stigmatization of this group of people, which is a function of their status as largely ex-offenders, the desire to commit scarce resources to take care of them even during disasters, begs the question. Yet, it is necessary to plan and prepare to intervene and protect them during disasters for the following reasons:

Vulnerability as a Social Group

This point was adequately discussed in the preceding sections. This group is considered part of the vulnerable population category and is the most hard-hit during a disaster. They are those whose peculiar characteristics expose them to greater risk during emergency situations than other citizens (Haddow et al., 2017). A broader definition of the concept was offered by Nick et al. (2009) who described vulnerable population as referring to any group or community whose circumstances create barriers to obtaining or understanding information, or the ability to react as the general population. Circumstances that could create barriers may include age, physical, mental, emotional, or cognitive status, culture, ethnicity, religion, language, citizenship, geography, or socioeconomic status.

SAMSHA (2017) used the term vulnerability to refer to greater risk of negative experiences, effects, and reactions during and after a disaster. Ajibade et al. (2013) argued that vulnerability to disaster is a function of both physical and social factors. In their view, vulnerability is determined by social inequalities rooted in gender, class, culture, race, and age, together with situational factors such as where people live. Carceral persons, including individuals in transitional houses, have been described as vulnerable, their vulnerability accentuated by a myriad of social and economic factors, including poverty and social stigma (Sattembrino, 2017; Le Dé, & Gaillard, 2017). It is therefore important that effort be made to extend a certain level of concern and empathy to this group.

Obligations of Texas Department of Criminal Justice

As I stated earlier in this piece, residents of transitional houses are first and foremost, clients of the TDCJ, being the agency that contracted these facilities that seek to reintegrate offenders initially placed on parole (McGowan, 2016). That relationship, *ipso facto*, places some contractual and statutory obligations on TDCJ as an agency, to protect its clientele especially during disasters where their vulnerability places a barrier in their ability to protect themselves. Besides, it is both ethically and morally right to reach out and help the less privileged in times of crisis (Cooper, 2012). It therefore behooves TDCJ to ensure that staff placed over these residents are properly trained and adequately prepared to undertake emergency response operations during disasters.

Second Chance-A Reintegrating Concept

Second chance is a concept widely used in the criminal justice field to depict the granting

of opportunities at life, to previously incarcerated persons. It is embodied in the

philosophy that although these persons committed crimes against the state, by serving

time, they have paid the price for their crimes and so the rest of their lives should not be

driven by their past, but rather, they should be given a second lease at life. This

philosophy finds expression in different spheres of life including education and

employment hence stories abound of the success that resulted from second-chance

initiatives. For instance, the Second Chance Pell Pilot Program, a 3-year Experimental

Sites Initiative facilitated by the U.S. Department of Education (DoE), has helped to

propel access to higher education inside prisons, dramatically altering the landscape of

postsecondary education in prison (Castro et al., 2018).

The first step Act, passed by Congress and signed by President Trump in 2018,

created a mechanism for prisoners who had been sentenced for minor offenses to apply

for resentencing [second chance], where changes to sentencing provisions created under

the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 would be retroactively applied to their sentences

(Hopwood, 2019). Matthew Charles, the first beneficiary of that act, was former president

Trump's guest of honor at the state of the union and serves as a criminal justice fellow at

Families Against Mandatory Minimums [FAMM] and has met with multiple members of

Congress and state governors while advocating for justice reform (Hopwood).

To bring this closer home, several inner-city programs are offered with the aim of

providing opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration for previously incarcerated

persons. Such programs include but are not limited to "Unlocking DOORS" ®, a

nonprofit organization and unique reentry network platform that uses its brokerage

system to provide services to any employer who agrees to offer employment to their

clients i.e., previously incarcerated persons (Unlockingdoors.org). Also, Corecivic, a

leading provider of high-quality corrections and detention management services, offers a

variety of rehabilitation and reentry services including academic, vocational, faith-based,

and substance abuse services (Corecivic.com). Both of these programs are examples of

efforts at providing individuals a second chance at life.

It is interesting to note that most of these individuals, were residents of

transitional houses when they first got released. Some, like 52-year-old Ramon, formerly

a client at Unlocking Doors, went on to set up their own trucking businesses, becoming

an employer of labor (Unlockingdoors.org). Ensuring preparedness during disasters, in

order to offer protection and save the lives of these clients at transitional houses, seem the

right thing to do, an absolute imperative.

<h3 style="text-align:center">Summary</h3>

A literature review reveals what is currently known about the subject as a basis

for contextualizing the current study. In this context, this study followed a historical

journey that traced the evolution of emergency management as a platform for

understanding the place of disaster preparedness in the milieu. Transitional housing as a

concept emerged out of the desire to provide temporary residence for previously

incarcerated persons and equip them with skills for independent life thereafter. Texas

Department of Criminal Justice [TDCJ], imbibed this concept, and through a contractual

agreement with the private sector, institutionalized it as a framework for rehabilitating and reintegrating clients.

Emergency management is divided into four main phases of which preparedness is a major component. Preparedness itself embodies a myriad of other areas including planning, training and exercise etc., which, taken holistically, demonstrates how organizations such as transitional houses, prepare to take care of their residents during disasters, especially how they relate with the private sector and other stakeholders. This leads to the issue of collaboration and partnerships, a condition precedent for any successful emergency response operation. The complexity of an emergency response compels the convergence of resources in a collaborative approach to ensure effective and efficient disaster intervention. This collaboration is often accomplished through multi-agency and mutual aid partnerships, other stakeholders, elected officials, and very importantly, volunteers.

Disaster preparedness is often guided by certain legislative provisions that provide both statutory and regulatory frameworks that ensure compliance to acceptable standards. For instance, NIMS is the standard method for managing emergency response operations at all levels of government regardless of incident type, size, or complexity (Hambridge et al., 2017). It provides a comprehensive operating guideline to all agencies and organizations, to ensure proper compliance. Also, this study reaffirms the existence of a relationship between socioeconomic status and disaster preparedness. Drawing from previous studies and experience from past disasters such as Katrina, including the current Covid-19 pandemic, the study revealed that poverty is intricately linked to people's

ability to prepare for disaster, making it imperative that organizations like transitional

houses whose clientele fall within this description, are helpless hence preparedness is

critical to save lives in the event of disaster.

Finally, against the urge to wonder why one should be concerned about disaster

preparedness in transitional houses, this study provides such a rationale by examining

residents' vulnerability as a social group, agency statutory obligation, moral and ethical

considerations, and the need to offer a second chance at life. Disaster preparedness in

transitional houses, as with the general public, should follow certain laid down

procedures or approaches in order to achieve the common good of saving lives during

disaster events. The next chapter provides a roadmap for a field study that operationalized

the research and enabled an understanding of disaster preparedness in a typical

transitional housing setting.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Disaster preparedness is having the right people with appropriate training at the right place at the right time with adequate supplies and the means to respond during emergencies (Curtis, 2015). When done under the stipulated procedures, this process is designed to save lives especially, within vulnerable communities such as transitional houses. The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand staff disaster preparedness in transitional houses in Texas. Reviewed literature indicated that whereas studies in disaster preparedness had been conducted within many segments of the vulnerable population group, there have been no studies on emergency preparedness in transitional houses especially from the perspective of staff. My study was designed to fill this knowledge gap by exploring the perceptions of staff preparedness in transitional houses in Texas.

This chapter is divided into several sections including the introduction, research design, and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, instrumentation, and data analysis. Other sections are issues of trustworthiness such as credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical considerations. The chapter ends with a summary and a transition to Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

In this study, I used a general qualitative design to explore the perceptions of staff preparedness for emergency response in transitional houses in Texas. The objective was to have a better understanding of staff preparedness for emergency response in the transitional housing community. With a focus on interviewing as the main tool for data

collection, a qualitative approach enabled me to obtain more in-depth and detailed information on the perception of staff for disaster preparedness in transitional houses (see O' Sullivan et al., 2017). Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested that open-ended interviews encouraged flexibility, probes, and follow-up questions that help elicit richer information. Although, I considered other sources such as observation methods, ultimately interviews and document review were my preferred sources of data collection because other sources did not properly align with the nature and purpose of the study and/or my research question. Most importantly, in-depth qualitative interviewing, as a technique that affords researchers an opportunity to talk to those with knowledge of, or experience with the problem of interest (Rubin & Rubin), provided the richest information base for my study.

Research Question

I posed the following research question: What are the perceptions of staff (employees and volunteers) on disaster preparedness in transitional houses in Texas?

Phenomenon of Interest

The phenomenon of interest in this study was disaster preparedness among the staff of transitional houses in Texas and their perception of it. As part of the vulnerable population groups marginalized by stigmatization, unequal exposure, and socioeconomic inequalities, the residents in transitional houses suffer the consequences of unpreparedness during emergency operations which make them more likely to be injured or killed during a disaster (Settembrino, 2017). I sought a better understanding of staff preparedness for disaster response in transitional houses.

Research Tradition

This was a general qualitative study that relied on interviewing as the main source of data. This was consistent with the views held by Ravitch and Carl (2016) who stated that interviews are at the center of most qualitative studies since they provide deep, rich individualized data central to qualitative research. According to Sandelowski (2000), researchers conducting qualitative studies, avail themselves of the chance to collect as much data as they can, which allows them to capture all the elements of an event or phenomenon. Thus, a qualitative approach enabled me to obtain more in-depth and detailed information on the topic of preparedness for emergency response in transitional houses (see O' Sullivan et al., 2017). The approach used in-depth, semi-structured methods of interviewing (see Carter et al., 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Patton, 2015; Sandelowski, 2000) to gather information on the perception of staff preparedness for emergency response in transitional houses. This open-endedness, according to Tuner (2010), citing Gall et al. (2003), allowed the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desired, while providing me the opportunity to ask probing and follow-up questions.

Rationale for Chosen Tradition

A qualitative research method was chosen because it aligned with both my research purpose and the research question, providing the framework that elicited answers to the latter. And since the qualitative methodology is a preferred method of inquiry by social scientists who study individuals or organizational behavior in their natural settings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), the transitional housing setting suited this method

of inquiry. Open-ended interviews allowed respondents to freely discuss challenges and needs experienced in their effort to ensure organizational preparedness, without being overly constrained by predetermined responses (see Gin et al., 2016). This reflects the second part of the research question which deals with perception - deducible by gauging a person's feelings and emotions expressed through open dialogue. Additionally, open-ended interviews encouraged flexibility, probes, and follow-up questions that helped elicit richer information (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Patton (2015) suggested that open-ended responses are central to qualitative data and emerge from asking open-ended questions. According to the author, interviews that rely on open-ended questions allow the participants the freedom to use their knowledge and imagination. Rubin and Rubin (2012) made a definitive claim on the importance of interviewing as a tool for data collection in qualitative research when they suggested that in-depth qualitative interviewing derived such preeminence because, through it, the researcher is looking for rich and detailed information using open-ended questions.

This study focused on one of the state-approved and privately managed transitional houses in Texas. A purposive sampling of 14 participants was drawn from stakeholders including 11 employees and three volunteers, both male and female, to ensure balanced demographic representation. These were people believed to be knowledgeable in the phenomenon of study and therefore able to provide relevant information. Patton (2015) contended that the logic and power of purposive sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases which yield insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations. Purposive sampling also has the advantage of increasing

the scope or range of data as well as uncover an array of perspectives from the sample of participants (Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research hence his or her role is central in every aspect especially data collection and analysis (Cresswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Karagioszis, 2018; Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This implies that the researcher is as much a part of the study as the subject and method employed (O' Sullivan et al., 2017). As a participant-observer, my role was to collect, analyze and present the data as I saw them. Trondsen and Sandaunet (2009) rationalized the centrality of the researcher in the research process by arguing that this enables the researcher to explore the social context of the phenomenon of study by engaging the study participants in ways that instigate their analysis of issues that affect them and proffer solutions to them.

Management of Bias

Because of the subjective nature of the qualitative inquiry, it is critical for the researcher to understand his or her biases and manage them in a way that prevents them from corrupting the interpretation of the experiences and perspectives of the participants, (Creswell, 2013, as cited in Ezeocha, 2016). For this reason, the researcher's neutrality must be sacrosanct if the findings must be meaningful and respected. I fully understood my role as a researcher, and I managed my potential biases by constantly double checking with the participants for information accuracy. Additionally, managing my bias entailed an openness in formulating the interview questions, coding, analyzing the data,

and reporting the findings of the study. I recognized the fact that as a researcher, my personal knowledge and experience were potential sources of bias (see Creswell, 2013), therefore, to further minimize bias, it was important to allow the participants to tell their own stories and/or share their experiences in line with the questions posed rather than lead, interject or influence their responses. Since according to Fusch et al. (2018), qualitative researchers bring their biases to the research and strive to mitigate such personal biases to ensure accurate interpretation of participants' views, it was vital to address my position and demonstrate how I intended to ensure trustworthiness.

I have been a parole officer with the Texas department of criminal justice, parole division, for about 15 years. Although I have worked different caseloads during my career, I have only worked the halfway house caseload very briefly in a volunteer capacity. Although I did not work with or directly supervise the residents in the transitional houses, I recognized that my position, if not well managed, had the tendency of constituting a bias. Nevertheless, as an agency insider, my ability to interact and "speak the language" of the agency was an added advantage. Thus, I leveraged my position as an insider to enhance my data sources. At the same time, I managed my potential biases by constantly double checking with the participants for information accuracy and maintaining openness and transparency. My role as a researcher was to gather data on staff preparedness for disaster response in transitional houses and to present my findings the way I saw them.

Methodology

The research methodology took into consideration steps that ensured an alignment of the research design, the research question, instrumentation or interview questions, and data collection, all in tandem with the theoretical framework as the fulcrum of the study. This was a general qualitative study in which I aimed at a better understanding of staff preparedness for emergency response in transitional houses, hence the goal was to use tools, methods, and strategies that would help to support exploring and understanding the participants' perceptions of their preparedness for emergency response.

The quantitative methodology, on the contrary, conforms to the need for looking at relationships between variables and/or measuring variables statistically, while mixed-method research enables researchers to exploit the advantages inherent in qualitative and quantitative research methods to carry out balanced research (Morse, 2015; Rudestam & Newton, 2015). I chose interviews as the main instrument for data collection consistent with the views held by Ravitch and Carl (2016) who stated that interviews were at the center of most qualitative studies since they provide deep, rich individualized data central to qualitative research. This position was further supported by Patton (2015), Rubin and Rubin (2012), and O'Sullivan et al. (2017), all of whom projected interviews as best suited for qualitative studies.

I developed a set of qualitative questions related to (a) staff knowledge about disaster preparedness, (b) their knowledge of and participation in training and exercise activities related to disaster preparedness, (c) their perception of preparedness and, (d) their knowledge concerning the perception of risk in their preparedness protocol. Since

there are two parts to the research question, I structured the questions to elicit responses that enabled me to understand their preparedness and gauge their perception of disaster preparedness thereby answering the research question.

Sampling and Research Participants

This study covered a transitional house in Texas and focused primarily on the staff. It is important to define staff in the context of this study to imply (a) employees of the organizations that manage the transitional houses and (b) volunteers, including parole officers, who assist in emergency response during disasters. This differentiation is important because while each group functions under a different line of authority, both interact and operate within the system to provide emergency response services when disaster strikes. Therefore, together, they constituted the target or study population, while the general population included residents in those facilities (see O'Sullivan et al., 2017). Fourteen participants representing both segments of the transitional housing community were selected using a nonprobability purposive sampling (see Guest et al., 2006), informed more by the desire to conduct fieldwork and report the data as found, rather than generalize.

Participant Selection

In selecting participants, I adopted a purposive sampling method which, according to Patton (2015), entails selecting participants who were knowledgeable on the phenomenon of study and willing and capable of providing information-rich cases which yield insights and in-depth understanding and, in the process, ensured strategic alignment with the inquiry's purpose, primary questions, and data being collected. Based

on these criteria, purposive sampling of 14 participants was drawn, including 11 employees and three volunteers, male and female to ensure balanced demographic representation. The sample was deemed sufficient and reflective of a demographic spread of the staff and volunteers that work at the facility used for the study.

Criteria for Sample Selection

As stated earlier, 14 persons drawn from across the staff and volunteers formed the participant pool for this study. These were individuals knowledgeable about the phenomenon under study, knowledge that derived from their experience and/or participation in emergency response operations. An additional criterion for this selection included the fact that this range was deemed sufficient to attain data saturation- the point in data collection and analysis when new information produced little or no change (see Chamaz, 2014; Cresswell, 2013; Guest et al., 2006; Mason, 2010; Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Using several parameters including variability, homogeneity, and expertise, Guest et al. (2006) showed that data saturation can be achieved after about 12 interviews, especially for research in which the aim was to understand common perceptions and experiences among a group of relatively homogenous individuals. Boddy (2016) posited that practical research illustrates that samples of 12 may be sufficient in cases where data saturation occurs among a relatively homogeneous population. This clearly fits the mode of my study and agrees with the generally acclaimed notion among qualitative researchers that sample size selection often depended on the purpose, nature, scope, and aims of the study (Charmaz, 2014; Guest et al., 2006; Mason, 2010; Morse, 2000).

Procedures for Participant Identification, Contact, and Recruitment

The procedure for identifying and recruiting my participants was based on purposeful selection and relied on the suggestion in Patton (2015), that participants so selected must be those knowledgeable on the phenomenon of study and hence capable of providing information-rich cases which yield insights and in-depth understanding.

My first step, therefore, was to request and secure permission to conduct interviews at the facility identified for my study. This was followed with institutional review board (IRB) approval in order to assure participants of their right to participate and protection against harm. Thereafter, I used my established relationship with the facility director to identify my interviewees based on the criteria indicated earlier, ensuring that such persons worked in the transitional houses and had knowledge of preparedness protocols during disasters and thus were a good fit for the research inquiry. I did this through the use of recruitment fliers (see Appendix B) which were displayed at strategic locations within the facility to create awareness of and announce the start of the project.

I followed this up by personally contacting qualified participants who either self-volunteered or were referred for recruitment, via phone calls, emails, or text messages as applicable. I developed a recruitment email (see Appendix C), which was sent to each potential participant inviting them to participate in the interview process. The selected prospective participants were asked to choose pseudo names by which they were to be identified to maintain confidentiality. I conducted prescreening interviews during which prospective participants were briefed on the purpose of my study, the interview pattern,

their rights, especially privacy concerns and secure their initial consent. Finally, an appropriate location or setting- a secured office within the premises of the transitional houses, was identified, and the interview date was selected. Interviews lasted 30-45 minutes on average.

Establishing a Trusted Relationship

To enhance effective participation of individuals especially in gathering meaningful data, it was necessary to recruit those who were knowledgeable about the subject and willing to provide high-quality information needed to answer the research question. Accomplishing this task, required establishing a trusted relationship made possible through the purposive sampling method, a process through which participants were selected from a pool of people known to possess or display knowledge and willingness to share.

The informed consent required that I explain the purpose of the study to the participants and their role in the process and have them commit by signing the consent form. And although my study fits into the "administrative or policy research" (O'Sullivan et al., 2017, p.250), where the likelihood of participants experiencing physical harm or life-threatening effects is zero, innocuous-appearing studies may leave participants feeling angry, disappointed, and less-trusting. I recognized that concealment or deception may result in a gradual erosion of trust and hence inimical to the research process (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). To forestall this situation, I was transparent and honest in all my dealings with the participants and to the extent possible, and without breaching the professional code of conduct and ethics, maintained an appreciable degree of informal

relationship with them. Lastly, I assured them of my determination to maintain the

highest level of confidentiality and privacy in our dealings, promising that their identities

would not be made available to third parties without their written consent.

Finally, to further reinforce the element of trust in my relationship with the

participants, it was necessary to declare my biases up front, assuring them that the

outcome of the research would be dependent upon the data they provided. To

operationalize this, I used peer review and member checking which in addition, ensured

both the validity and credibility of the study. Shenton (2004), citing Guba & Lincoln

(1985), described member checking as the single most important provision that bolsters a

study's credibility, recommending that checks may take place anytime during or after the

data collection process. Spall (1998) had similar views, suggesting that peer debriefing

contributes to the confirmation that the findings and interpretations are worthy, honest,

and believable.

Data Collection

This study employed in-depth, semi-structured open-ended interviews,

complemented with document review, as primary sources of data. This was consistent

with the views of Ravitch and Carl (2016) who suggested that interviews are at the center

of most qualitative studies since they provide deep, rich individualized data central to

qualitative research. This position is similar to an earlier view by O'Sullivan et al. (2017),

Patton (2015), and Rubin and Rubin (2012), and all of who described interviews as best

suited for qualitative studies. A total of 14 participants were interviewed for this study.

This number included 11 employees and three volunteers. The interview sessions lasted

about 30-45 minutes on average. Also, an internal document, made available to me, was reviewed as part of data collection. At the end of the interview process, the transcripts were manually transcribed, and copies were given back to the participants to double-check for accuracy. Prior to interviews, participants were required to sign informed consent agreements, while information was recorded via notetaking, audiotaped for accuracy, and stored in a secure place for confidentiality. Data would be kept in this secured place for about 5 years after which they will be destroyed in accordance with Walden University policy. All paper data will be shredded via a paper shredder, while electronic data will be destroyed with the use of pulverizers or incinerators.

Instrumentation

In this segment, I describe the steps and processes in developing my research instruments- another vital component of my research. As stated earlier in my study, I selected qualitative methodology and semi-structured open-ended interviewing as well as document review, as my data-collection techniques. My research question aimed at understanding the perception of staff [employees and volunteers] in their preparedness for disaster response in transitional houses and so it was important to ensure that my interview questions were aligned to the research question. Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested that interviews are likely to focus on a research question, asking why something happened, what it means, or how a process or event unfolded. Patton (2015) maintained similar position, adding that open-ended responses add depth, detail, and meaning at a very personal level of experience, the goal being to uncover as much about the participants and their situations as possible (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012).

I developed a set of qualitative questions related to (1) staff knowledge about disaster preparedness, (2) their knowledge of and participation in training and exercise activities related to disaster preparedness, (3) their perception of preparedness and, (4) their knowledge concerning the perception of risk in their preparedness protocol. Since there are two parts to the research question viz: perception and preparedness, I structured the interview questions to elicit responses that enabled me understand staff *preparedness* and gauge their *perception* of disaster preparedness, and hence answer the research question (See Appendix E).

Interviews

Interviews were the primary source of data for this study and were conducted in the English language, with document review as a secondary source. Seidman (2012) suggested that interviewing is a basic mode of inquiry, at the root of which lies an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of it. Thus, the purpose was to allow me to gaze into the interviewees' perspectives (Patton, 2015), in ways that opened a window into the participants' worldview thereby eliciting information-rich responses. Interviews were conducted using a face-to-face format, a technique that had the added advantage of eliminating time delays while encouraging spontaneity in both questions and answers (Opdenakker, 2006). Each individual interview session lasted for about 30-45 minutes on average and was conducted using the same set of interview questions with applicable follow-ups (See Appendix D). All participants were fluent in English hence no translators were needed. I employed the use of a recording device to ensure every piece of information was captured for eventual analysis.

Finally, interviews were conducted in office space within the facility, specially selected and prepared for this purpose.

Document Review

In addition to the interviews, a review of an internal document provided by the facility also formed part of my data collection. The combination of interviews and document review was deemed necessary to achieve data source triangulation, a process that helps develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and test validity through the convergence of information from different sources (Carter et al., 2014). The document was reviewed and analyzed separately with similarities and differences identified in order to conclude how they affected the results (Carter et al.)

Data Analysis Process

Data analysis for this project followed a rigorous and meticulous process. The data analysis took into consideration, the research question which sought to understand the perceptions of staff [employees and volunteers] on disaster preparedness in transitional houses in Texas. I employed thematic coding as part of content analysis to analyze the data. This is a process by which themes and patterns are identified in a qualitative data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this context, thematic coding helped to identify themes that emerged from the data as it related to staff perception of their preparedness for emergency response. In adopting this method, I relied on Braun and Clarke's six-step approach which includes familiarization with the data, by immersing myself in the data to gain detailed insights into the phenomenon

being explored (Smith & Firth, 2011). This was achieved through reading and rereading the interview transcripts a couple of times and making notes along the way.

Next was transcribing- a process of reproducing spoken words, such as those from an audiotaped interview, into written text (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006), enabling me to represent the data already gathered, and to begin processing them into usable material for the research. Here, I manually transcribed the data thereby enhancing both the quality and accuracy and ensuring data saturation. Through this process, codes were sorted out through color highlighting and numbering (superscript) and combined to generate themes and sub-themes (Glauberman & Qureshi, 2018).

Other steps included generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing, defining, and naming themes, and producing the final written output. This interactive process allowed me to begin to identify the emergent themes and concepts that were embedded in the interview data. (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). On account of the need to achieve data triangulation by combining both interview patterns, Carter et al. (2014) recommended that data so collected be analyzed separately, synthesized, and similarities and differences identified to see how each method impacts the outcome. This process was applied in analyzing data from both the interviews and document review.

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Issues of Trustworthiness

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Quality, trustworthiness or validity, and credibility are essential ingredients in any qualitative research to the extent that collectively, they demonstrate the value the reader places on such a study (see Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Shenton, 2004). To ensure the

trustworthiness of the research, I relied on the steps suggested in Shenton (2004) which

include the development of an early familiarity with the participating organization to gain

a good understanding of their internal dynamics and establish a relationship of trust.

Other measures include triangulation, a process that helps develop a comprehensive

understanding of a phenomenon and also test validity through the convergence of

information from different sources including in-depth interviewing and document review

(Carter et al., 2014). In the same vein, member checking, managing my biases, frequent

debriefings, interactive questioning, and audit trail are all tools that helped ensure

trustworthiness (Cresswell, 2009; Carlson, 2010; Patton, 2015).

According to Patton (2015), the credibility of qualitative research is anchored on

three pillars and these include the rigor applied in collecting, recording, and storing high-

quality field data and analyzing them, the credibility of the researcher, and philosophical

belief in the value of qualitative research. Ravitch and Carl (2016) suggested that a more

rigorous research process will result in more trustworthy findings. And in that regard, I

was drawn to the benchmark established by Guba (1981) as cited in Ravitch & Carl

(2016), which include the following standards:

Credibility

Credibility refers to the need for the researcher to take into account, all of the

complexities that they experience in the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It deals with the

question of congruency of findings with reality and assumes that the researcher has

painted a true and accurate picture of the phenomenon under study (Shenton, 2004).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that establishing and ensuring credibility is one of

the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness in research. Therefore, credibility underscores the extent to which the research findings are true, factual, believable, and in alignment with the reality of the study. To demonstrate the credibility of my data sources, I engaged my interviewees in a professional manner, declared my biases upfront, used triangulation and member checking to ensure the authenticity of my data sources since, according to Simon (2011), member checking adds to the validity of the observer's interpretation of qualitative observations.

Transferability

This entails the ability of the research to be applicable or transferrable to broader contexts while still maintaining their content-specific richness (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It represents the degree to which a set of findings from one study could be transferred to another particular situation (Burkholder, 2016). This is important given that the goal of qualitative research is not to produce true statements that can be generalized but to develop descriptive, context-relevant statements. Shenton (2004) held a similar view, arguing that since the findings of qualitative research are only specific to a small segment of a population, it is impossible to demonstrate that such findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations. Therefore, I was encouraged by the author's conclusion that understanding of a phenomenon is gained gradually through several studies, rather than one major project conducted in isolation. In that instance, it remains my hope that findings from this study could be replicated in similar settings elsewhere following the meticulous process adopted in this study.

Dependability

This measurement tool requires that one has a reasoned argument for how data was collected and that the process of data collection is stable and consistent over time (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Shenton (2004) however, warned against the undue emphasis on dependability. According to the author, dependability is a challenging concept to be established and demonstrated in qualitative research due to the often-changing nature of the phenomenon being investigated as well as the challenges with replicating a lived experience. Shenton, therefore, suggested that qualitative researchers should, at the very least, transparently document their research process so that other researchers can repeat the study in the future if necessary. In pursuit of this principle, therefore, all face-to-face interviews conducted, as well as transcripts of data, were recorded in digital audio systems and stored in a secured place. Also, an effort was made to ensure careful and detailed documentation of all steps taken in the research process, as well as the shortcomings and/or limitations, to enable interested researchers to replicate the study elsewhere.

Confirmability

This is the qualitative equivalent of objectivity and seeks to establish and demonstrate as much as possible, that research findings and conclusions are a true reflection of participants' lived experience and not just ideas or opinions held by the researcher (Shenton, 2004). It recognizes the fact that qualitative researchers do not claim to be objective, but instead seek to have confirmable data and relative neutrality and biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Miles and Huberman (1994) published similar opinions,

suggesting that confirmability is determined by the extent to which the researcher admits his/her own biases. Thus, ensuring that my obvious biases do not unduly influence the research, became very crucial in order to demonstrate confirmability. This, I accomplished by declaring those biases upfront and constantly kept this in mind. Secondly, triangulation is a technique that greatly reduced my predispositions (Shenton, 2004; Fusch et al., 2018), and I leveraged this especially in data collection as earlier indicated. As stated, my data analysis drew from Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach, which includes familiarization with the data by immersing oneself in the data to gain detailed insights into the phenomenon being explored. This, as well as member checking, helped ensure accurate representation of participants' views (Smith & Firth, 2011).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues are present in any kind of research more so in qualitative inquiry. This is so because the research process creates tension between the aims of the researcher to produce a quality research product, and the rights of participants to maintain privacy Ethics is the study of values and how to define right and wrong, and doing right not wrong (O'Leary, 2014). As Stevens (2013) suggested, the complexities of researching private lives and placing the accounts in the public domain raises multiple ethical issues for the researcher.

Qualitative researchers focus their research on exploring, examining, and describing people and their natural environments. Inherent in this interaction, is the tendency to violate peoples' privacy rights sometimes, inadvertently, hence any research

that includes people requires an awareness of the ethical issues that may derive from such interactions. It was therefore imperative that efforts be made to ensure that the highest level of ethical considerations was applied to this research process.

In making such decisions, I had to contend with the issue of conflicting interests, loyalties, or obligations (Cooper, 2009). For instance, there was the draw between my role as a researcher and that of a dedicated employee of an agency whose staff formed part of my interviewee pool. This dilemma required walking a fine line between the dual responsibilities. Thus, addressing the critical responsibility of challenging and/or confronting my biases required a reflexive approach that included developing and maintaining an openness to feedback (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I tried to maintain a professional approach throughout the research process.

Secondly, the privacy rights of participants especially during the interview process of data collection was of primary consideration to me. Although ethical review boards such as IRB scrutinize most research proposals, I was aware that as a researcher, I was ultimately responsible for protecting the participants and their rights. I took this responsibility seriously by maintaining the highest degree of honesty and openness, declaring my biases upfront, and maintaining the required level of confidentiality. Importantly, prior to interviews participants were required to sign informed consent agreements, by which the participants were made aware of their right to be informed about the study, their right to freely decide whether or not to participate in the study, and to withdraw at any time without consequence. Information was recorded via notetaking, audiotaped for accuracy, and stored in a secure place for confidentiality. These data will

be destroyed after 5 years, in accordance with Walden University policy. All paper data will be shredded via a paper shredder, while electronic data will be destroyed with the use of pulverizers or incinerators. These measures are sure to provide the needed confidence that ethics has been factored into the research process.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand staff perception of their emergency preparedness in transitional houses in Texas. Qualitative methodology was a preferred approach because of its obvious advantages including the utilization of multiple data sources and the ability to obtain more in-depth and detailed information on the topic. Data were collected via individual face-to-face interviews and document review and analyzed using content analysis. The data were then stored in a password-protected lock safe with back-up on a thumb drive, while a hard copy was printed for additional security. Finally, I ensured that ethical considerations were upheld through transparency and full provision of all disclosures including the purpose of the study, as well as obtain participants' informed consent in writing as required under IRB guidelines. These measures ensured that the research attained the highest level of credibility with adequate potential for future replicability. The next chapter discusses the results of the data analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of staff preparedness for disaster response in transitional houses. The study was informed by the need to direct focus on the safety of residents of transitional houses, a population group whose unequal exposure, marginalization, and social stigma contribute to their vulnerability, making them more likely to be injured or killed during a disaster (see Settembrino, 2017). The intent was to seek a better understanding of staff preparedness for disaster response in transitional houses in Texas, an understanding that would help position both staff and policymakers for a better management of their residents during disasters. In this inquiry, I sought to answer the following research question:

RQ: What are the perceptions of staff on disaster preparedness of transitional houses in Texas?

This chapter focuses on my data collection, analysis, and presentation. It is therefore apt that I begin the chapter by describing the setting under which data collection took place. It is followed by participant demographics, data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness before presenting the results. This chapter concludes with a summary and transition to Chapter 5.

Setting

Data for this study were collected at a transitional housing facility in the State of Texas. Following the IRB approval (#03-17-21-0606440), I met with the facility director and the operations manager and briefed them about my research study and participant recruitment procedures as contained in the informed consent document. Together, we

agreed on certain modalities for the interviews including, the date, time, and format.
Following agreements, the company gave approval for me to advertise the study via my
fliers, while they purposefully selected potential participants for the study using the
criteria outlined on the fliers. I debriefed each participant individually prior to
interviewing, to avoid any disruption in agency operations that would have resulted from
pulling all participants off their duty posts for debriefing.

Demographics

Participant demographics and characteristics relevant to the study included the
fact that all participants were either staff or volunteers that worked at the facility in line
with the nature and language of my research question. Earlier in this discourse, I had
carefully defined staff to imply employees who work at the facility and volunteers
(including parole officers) who assist at the facility. The demographic distribution of the
participants incorporated this format. Additionally, all participants had knowledge of the
subject with varying years of service ranging between 2-12 years. They included three
males and eight females for the employees and two males and one female for the
volunteers for a total of 14 participants. I exceeded my initial plan of interviewing about
12 participants due to the need to attain data saturation. No specific demographics data
such as age or race was collected from participants, nor was any identifying information
used. Instead, codes were assigned to each participant in place of their names, to ensure
protection of their identity in line with the informed consent provision. Table 2 below
shows the demographic characteristics of the interview participants.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participants' codes	Position	Gender	Years of Service
P1	Staff	Female	10
P2	Staff	Female	5
P3	Staff	Female	31/2
P4	Staff	Female	6
P5	Staff	Male	11
P6	Staff	Female	4
P7	Staff	Male	5
P8	Staff	Female	6
P9	Staff	Female	7
P10	Staff	Male	5
P11	Staff	Female	5
P12	Volunteer	Male	3
P13	Volunteer	Female	2
P14	Volunteer	Male	3

Note: Pseudonyms listed instead of actual names of participants for confidentiality purposes.

Data Collection

The facility management helped to identify the participants I interviewed through purposeful sampling. These participants were individuals believed to be knowledgeable about the subject and who signified willingness to participate. I met and briefed each participant on the purpose of the study, their role, and especially, my assurance of the confidentiality of their identity. This comfort level was necessary to establish the initial rapport and elicit full and willing participation expressed through signing the consent forms.

Interviews

I collected my data using individual in-depth open-ended, face-to-face interviews (IDIs) that each lasted about 30-45 minutes. I used the same set of interview questions for all participants. All interviews were conducted in the English language and recorded using a recording device for the accuracy of information. I also took notes to augment the recorded interviews, and these helped to corroborate data from the recorded interviews during the transcription. Follow-up questions were used where necessary either to elicit more information or clarify some provided by the participants.

I originally intended to run focus group interviews, as proposed in Chapter 3 as a corollary data collection tool, but at the request of the facility I changed to individual interviews in order to maintain Covid-19 restrictions relating to clustering of persons. In its place, I obtained the organization's internal document that showed the agency's emergency response plan. This accounted for variation in the data collection process from what was proposed in Chapter 3.

Document Review

In addition to data collected via individual face-to-face interviews, I also collected secondary data by reviewing available and relevant document that showed the emergency response plan developed for/or by the organization. This proved most useful in triangulating data collected from individual interviews, a qualitative research strategy which according to Cater et al. (2014), helps test validity through the convergence of information from different sources. Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested that documents are most useful when combined with in-depth interviews, hence they avowed that "documentary analysis conducted as part of an in-depth interviewing study improves the quality of interviews…" (p28). The combination of individual interviews and document review therefore, provided a more balanced approach to the data analysis and ensured triangulation.

Data Analysis

My data analysis followed a rigorous and meticulous process of manually transcribing and then analyzing to ensure accuracy. Upon completing the transcription of the data, I forwarded the transcripts to the participants to check for accuracy-member checking. Only eight out of the 14 participants returned their transcripts, and all confirmed the accuracy of the information contained, while one made additional suggestions.

I relied on In Vivo approach as suggested by Saldaña (2014). This approach, which is synonymous with content analysis, is closely aligned with the six-step approach advocated in Braun and Clarke (2006), an interactive process which includes: (a)

familiarization with the data; (b) transcribing; (c) generating initial codes; (d) searching for theme; (e) reviewing, defining, and naming the themes and; (f) producing final written output.

Following these steps, I immersed myself in the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts, underlining participants' actual words and phrases that bore relevance to the research question until the words and phrases began to show patterns and make sense to me. This was my first cycle coding. Saldaña (2014) described In Vivo coding, also known as "verbatim coding" or "inductive coding" (p. 105) as a process that entails identifying words or phrases from the actual language used by participants, sort of "honoring and prioritizing participants's" voice.

Next, using different colored ink, I grouped the underlined words and/or phrases to form categories before assigning codes to them. This was the second cycle coding. Condensing these secondary codes from the categories, provided a reanalysis that saw the emergence of themes and subthemes which helped to answer my research question. For ease of identification and to maintain participant anonymity, I assigned a code to each of the participants ranging from P1 to P14. I determined agreement in the coding themes that were generated during the analysis by comparing ideas obtained from interview transcripts of individual participants. In the process, I was able to identify codes based on the words and meanings the participants presented. The result was a large number of codes. Table 3 shows the major themes that emerged from the process, the sub-themes, frequencies, and meanings.

Table 3

Themes, Subthemes/codes, and Frequencies

Themes	Sub-themes/Codes	Frequency	Meanings
Understanding of Concept	Getting Ready (5) To be prepared (4) Knowledge (5)	14	To gauge participants' understanding of subject matter
Experience	Participation in Drills (12) Experienced Tornadoes (2)	14	Determine experience based on participation in previous disasters
Training & Exercise	CPR (3); drills (4); videos (2); Active shooter (1); No training (3)	10	Ascertain training received in preparation for disasters.
NIMS Compliance	Definite no (9); Not sure (3); Yes (2)	-12	Whether participants have knowledge of or are trained in NIMS
Joint Session w/other agencies	None (11); Yes (1); Not sure (2)	-11	Joint training sessions with other agencies enhance preparedness
Risk Perception	Motivates if informed (7); it's my job (3); Deters me (2); Not sure (2)	10	To see if Risk motivates or deters staff from participating in disaster response.
Preparedness	Feel prepared (9); 50% prepared (2); Not prepared (3)	9	To gauge participants' perception of readiness
Knowledge of types/ Actions to be taken	Types (14); Actions (5); Not sure (6); don't know (3)	14 5 9	To gauge knowledge of different types of hazards and actions to be taken.
*Recommendations	More Training (10); Communications (3) Transportation (2)	10	Participants views on ways to improve preparedness
*Others	*Security (2); Staff rooms (3)		

Note: Themes, subthemes/codes, frequency of occurrence and meanings attributed.

All the participants were posed the same set of interviews questions, with different follow-up questions. The questions were structured to address the research question about staff perceptions of disaster preparedness in transitional houses in Texas. The themes, which emerged from the interview questions were the direct result of the codes. The analysis of these themes viewed through the lens of the interview questions will be presented later as results from the study.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Demonstrating trustworthiness in a qualitative study such as this entails addressing issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). These, together with member checking and triangulation, conferred an appreciable amount of validity to the research. For instance, I used member checking at various intervals during data collection, transcription, and analysis, by frequently checking in with participants to ensure a good understanding and accurate representation of their data. I triangulated the data by juxtaposing the interview transcripts with documentary analysis as well as my field notes, to see commonalities or differences among the various sources, and, how they combined to answer the research question. Other tools included managing my biases, frequent debriefings, interactive questioning, and audit trail all of which helped to ensure trustworthiness (see Carlson, 2010; Cresswell, 2009; Patton, 2015).

Credibility

According to Patton (2015), credibility of qualitative research is anchored on three pillars which include the rigor applied in collecting, recording, and storing high-

quality field data and analyzing them, the credibility of the researcher, and philosophical belief in the value of qualitative research. These values characterized this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that establishing and ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in demonstrating trustworthiness in research. Therefore, credibility underscores the extent to which the research findings are true, factual, believable, and in alignment with the reality of the study. As stated in Chapter 3, to ensure credibility, I engaged my interviewees in a professional manner, declared my biases up front, and used triangulation and member checking to ensure the authenticity of my data sources.

Transferability

Transferability entails the ability of the research to be applicable or transferrable to broader contexts while still maintaining their content-specific richness (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). It represents the degree to which a set of findings from one study could be transferred to another situation (Burkholder, 2016). To ensure that the study results are transferable, I provided rich and detailed descriptions and analysis of the data collected (interviews and documentary analysis). This created a solid framework or roadmap for any researcher or reader interested in replicating the study. Yet, in stating this, I was guided by the cautionary advice of Shenton (2004) in arguing that since findings of qualitative research are only specific to a small segment of a population, it is impossible to demonstrate that such findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations. However, my study could be replicated in a similar setting, strengthening an understanding of the subject.

Dependability

Dependability is a measurement tool that requires that one has a reasoned argument for how data was collected and that the process of data collection is stable and consistent over time (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Thus, ensuring the dependability of the study is important as it establishes the fact that the study findings are consistent with the collected data (Creswell, 2009). I ensured the dependability of the study by relying on the strategies enunciated in Chapter 3, which included the use of triangulation strategies in the data collection such as providing a detailed description of the methods used in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. Additionally, all face-to-face interviews conducted, as well as transcripts of data, were recorded in digital audio systems and stored. Finally, I made every conceivable effort to ensure careful and detailed documentation of all steps taken in the research process, as well as the shortcomings and/or limitations, to enable interested researchers to replicate the study elsewhere.

Confirmability

Confirmability seeks to establish and demonstrate as much as possible, that research findings and conclusions are a true reflection of participants' lived experience and not just ideas or opinions held by the researcher (Shenton, 2004). It helps to ensure that there is a clear linkage between the research data and interpretations thereof. To ensure confirmability, it was important to carefully document the rationale and motivation for decisions taken throughout the research process, for example jettisoning the idea for a focus group on account of space and the need to avoid clustering due to CDC Covid-19 restrictions. Most importantly, and consistent with the strategy expressed

in Chapter 3, I ensured that findings and conclusions emerged only from the raw data

gathered from the study participants, and not the product of any opinions I held.

Wherever appropriate, I quoted participants' views verbatim, avoiding inadvertent

modification of their views or opinions, a task accomplished through frequent member

checking, which Carlson (2010) described as a way of finding out whether the data

analysis is congruent with the participants' experiences. Member checking thus helped to

validate the accuracy of the transcription of audio data collected during the interviews as

well as my findings and conclusions, providing the participants opportunity to review and

clarify the meaning of statements, views, opinions, and comments made by them during

the interview sessions.

Results

The results I present in this section represent a comprehensive interpretation

based on analysis of the data collected from the participants. In presenting these results it

is important to draw attention to my research question which sought to explore staff

perception of disaster preparedness in transitional houses. Given the holistic nature of the

RQ- which has two parts viz: 'knowledge of concept' and 'perception of preparedness.'

I structured the interview questions to elicit responses that should enable an

understanding of staff preparedness and gauge their perception of disaster preparedness

and hence answer the RQ from these two perspectives. The results are therefore presented

in the form that aligns the emergent themes from the participants' responses with the

interview questions to see how they help in addressing the research question.

Theme 1. Understanding the Concept

This theme emerged from Question 1 and addresses participants' understanding of the concept of disaster preparedness which understanding is a *sine qua non* to determining their knowledge of what preparedness entails. The analysis showed that all 14 participants demonstrated varying degrees of understanding of the concept. Five participants used the words "getting ready" in their response to this question. For instance, P2 stated, "getting ready for something tragic, so whenever it makes an impact, we will be prepared." Participant P8 stated "knowing what to do in case of disasters such as Tornado, Storms or Fire." P11 said it meant "getting oneself ready before a disaster or at least having enough knowledge of what to do to protect the people." P1 suggested it implied "getting ready, getting all meds and supplies ready, have a way to make sure everyone is accounted for," while participant P6 said it meant "making sure everything is ready, getting equipment ready that you can use when any kind of crisis event happens." At least one of the three volunteers interviewed, P13, suggested it meant "actions you take before a disaster, preparing oneself for disaster, so basically, you are getting yourself ready for how you will address it when a disaster occurs."

Four of the respondents used the words "to be prepared" in their responses. Participant P3 stated it implied "need to be prepared; we need to prepare with clients' medications and supplies," while another volunteer, P14, simply said it meant "to be prepared for anything that happens that can cause destructions, harm or death." In a similar fashion, at least five of the respondents used the word "knowledge" to describe their understanding of the concept. Participant P10 stated, "it implies knowledge

of what to do when disaster strikes." For P4, it meant "being knowledgeable, being able to know what to do when something terrible happens," while P11 said it entails "having enough knowledge of what to do."

Theme 2. Experience

Another theme that emerged from the interview responses bothered on experience as addressed in Question 2. All the participants from P1to P14 claimed some type of experience mainly from participating in drills and/or actual tornadoes. P2 said, "during tornadoes, we asked residents to get in the hallways, out of the windows, while during fire drills, we got the fire extinguishers." P8 stated:

> As a middle school teacher, there was tornado and we had to move everyone to the hallway, away from glass windows. We got down in a position where you put your hands on your head and bend all the way down, we were in that position for about 2hrs.

P1 said, "I am originally from Alabama. I was involved in Hurricane Katrina & Hurricane Fredrick, and we made sure everyone was bundled up. We had food, flashlights, and other supplies." P6 stated, "in my previous job, I took part in drills for tornadoes, and we closed all windows, so no one gets hurt. We also made sure we had supplies, flashlights, and other essentials." And for P14, he said, "I was in the military and there, I took part in several rescue missions from crashed aircraft and participated in many natural disaster responses."

Theme 3. Training and Exercises

The emergent theme of training and exercise as indicated in Question 3 was at the core of this study. Again, participants indicated they had received some degree of training that prepared them for disaster response. Three participants indicated receiving periodic CPR training. For instance, P5 stated, "growing up we used to hang around firefighters, and they taught us a lot about fires firsthand and the right way to do it, and also how to do CPRs." P3 indicated "we do simulations, first aids, and CPRs." Other participants referred to drills as indicative of the type of training they received. Four respondents fell into this category. Participant P4 said:

> We have fire drills to where we lock up all the offices, walk on the hallways and bang on the doors to make sure all residents are heading outside. We take the roaster outside and mark off all the names to make sure everyone is accounted for.

P2 said, "we received training electronically [videos] and also engaged in drills." P11 said "we take training every 6 months. I used to complain about them making us watch these videos every time. Now, I know why they make us watch. It has become part of me. I believe consistency leads to perfection." One participant, P10, stated he had received active shooter training in his previous job. However, three participants P12, P13, and P14, all claimed they had not received any trainings at all. For instance, P12 said, "No, I did not receive any trainings nor participate in exercises here; they have not taught us anything." P13 simply said "no training" while P14 said, "I don't think we have had any trainings here, no training."

Theme 4. NIMS Compliance

This theme emerged out of Question 4 which sought to determine participants'

understanding of and training in NIMS, a national and state requirement for participation

in emergency response. Here, there was a near-unanimous denial of any knowledge of or

training in NIMS, as 13 out of 14 participants denied any knowledge. For instance,

Participant P2 said, "we do have trainings, but I have not heard of NIMS before." P8

stated, "I don't remember anything like that." P10 said, "I am not sure we have received

that type of training; I mean we have periodic fire drills but not on NIMS. No, I don't

know what it is." For P11, "not quite sure" was the response. P4 stated, "I don't think we

have had that training." P6 indicated "we receive training like fire drills and sometimes

police come or firefighters, but it is not focused on NIMS or anything like that." P12 was

very emphatic "No, we have not been trained on NIMS." P13 used one word "None"

while P14 said, "no such training here, in the military, very possible."

Theme 5. Joint Training Sessions With Other Agencies

This was another theme that emerged from the interviews, and it was prompted by

Question 5. Again, this theme garnered a near-unanimous "No" as 13 out the 14

respondents claimed not to have participated in any joint training sessions or simulations

with other agencies. This position was validated by participants such as P5 who said

"anytime there is an emergency here, we don't have joint training sessions, just the real

thing." P2 stated, "we do CPR with outside instructors, but not with police or

firefighters." P7 said, "we have had no joint training sessions with other agencies, but

that type of training is needed here." Participants P10, P11, P12, P13, and P14 employed

a simple expression of "No joint sessions" to illustrate their responses. Only participant

P3 claimed to have participated in a joint session:

> I have been in a joint training session, with the chamber of commerce here, with
>
> others such as police, firefighters, water people, hospitals, etc. They feed you and
>
> give you all kinds of information. It was just a management event.

Theme 6. Risk Perception

The perception of risk as elicited in Question 6, emerged as the central theme

from participants' responses. This theme is also the fulcrum of the theoretical framework

for this study and garnered the following responses from the participants. About 10

participants responded with a positive perception of risk as it relates to their willingness

or otherwise to prepare for or participate in disaster operations. For instance, when posed

the question, participant P2 replied "there is risk in everything in life, but the risk does

not discourage me, instead it pushes me to do my job of keeping the residents safe." P8

believes that "risk actually helps you prepare more especially when you are well

informed about the true situation so you know what you are up against." Respondent P4

stated, "It is part of our job, and risk makes us work hard to get clients to safety." P9 was

emphatic saying "risk motivates me if I am informed of what is going on by the authority.

It motivates me to do whatever needs to be done to help the clients." P6 replied, "risk

drives us to get clients where they need to be so long as you are told what the deal is.

Being informed about the situation, is the key." Participant P3 stated that "risk is scary,

but it is my job to protect these people because they don't know what I know or get the

same information in real-time as I do." This response was echoed by P11 who responded

in a similar fashion stating, "you accepted the risk when you signed for the job to care for these helpless individuals."

On the other hand, participant P12 said "It affects me, you are dealing with uncertainty. I am always scared, and not being properly trained makes it even worse." P10 said, "I won't risk my life for those guys though." P7 indicated that "the risk associated with disaster pushes us especially once we have been informed of the true position of things. Risk does not discourage but pushes us to jump in once the adrenalin kicks in."

Theme 7. Preparedness

This theme emerged from question seven which asked participants to gauge their preparedness confidence. A total of nine participants said they felt prepared, two claimed to be about 50% prepared while three said they were not prepared. Those who said they felt prepared included participant P5 who said "I am as well prepared as my previous experience, which gives me an extra edge." P3 said, "we are prepared, but we need more training and communication gadgets such as walkie-talkies so we can have uniform messages and also pass it to the clients." Participant P10 sounded the most positive note when he said "I am prepared. I am ready. I think quickly once I am informed about the problem; I am a leader and I believe in training: proper training prevents poor performance." P4 said, "I say about 50% prepared. I know what to do, but I don't have any of the other training on what to do if such situations occur." P1 stated, "I am prepared, but I don't know if I am well prepared." Participant P7 when asked, indicated "I think I am prepared, but we need periodic training to stay on top of things. I mean we

have fire drills, etc., but more training will certainly be helpful to keep all current." P6

suggested, "we are ok, but there are things that could be better. More training is needed

so everyone knows what to do and clients will know that staff got their back if disaster

hits."

However, participant P12 again, was emphatic stating "I am not prepared. I am

not at all prepared because we are not trained. I need more training. We need joint

training with other agencies that may be involved in a disaster." P13 said, "About 50%

prepared, there could always be more training." P14 "I think I am fairly prepared, mainly

due to my previous experience in the military. But the rest of the staff is about 20%

prepared."

Theme 8. Types of Hazards and Actions

This theme emerged out of responses from Question 8 about staff knowledge of

types of potential hazards and actions that can be taken to address them. Here all 14

respondents answered in the affirmative as far as enumerating various types of potential

disasters from hurricanes and fire, to storms, tornadoes, and active shooters. However,

only five indicated they knew what actions to take in the event of a disaster incident.

About nine participants stated they either did not know or were not sure. Those who

indicated knowledge included P10 who stated, "If hurricane hits, take residents to safety

in the hallways; for tornadoes, take them to the middle of the hallway, away from

windows." P2 mentioned "flooding, fire, tornadoes, etc., and I know what to do in each

case." P7 stated "for natural disasters like tornadoes, hurricane, storms, fire, etc., we

know what to do e.g., look for exits and/or call 911; but for man-made disasters like

active shooting, we have no training on what to do." P13 stated "I know what hazards or disasters can affect us here, but I don't know what to do to address each one of them." P12 echoed the same sentiment stating, "I am not sure what to do in each case."

Theme 9. Recommendations

The participants were asked to suggest ways of improving their preparedness for disaster response. The above theme emerged from their responses to Question 9. Majority of the participants, about 10 out of the 14 interviewed, suggested more training, especially by professionals. Four suggested a better communication system while one felt transportation was important. For instance, participant P8 said, "I want professionals to come and train us. Everybody needs to be on the same page. Let there be one standard way of doing things." P3 stated, "I want fire dept, defense, and hospitals to come and do training." For P1, P4, P6, P7, P9, and P12, it is "more training". Participants such as P5 suggested, "awareness of procedures, pass uniform information/message to both staff and residents, so everyone be on the same page. Communication and more training are my priority." P4 stated, "communication needs to be better, install intercom system so we can get the same message from same authority at the same time." Participant P10 said, "the other thing is training-better training. They should bring in outsiders to train us so we can dedicate ourselves to training without worrying about work."

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Supporting Themes from Interview Excerpts

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The foregoing sections dwelt on the emergent themes excerpted from the participants' interview transcripts and they directly addressed the research question. However, additional responses emerged in the course of the interviews which though,

may not directly relate to or address the research question, bear some significance as it relates to the study as a whole. These supporting themes include:

Informational Manual

This is a point with a meaningful connection to the research question though not tied to any emergent theme. At least one participant stressed the need for an informational manual with steps to be taken in the event of an emergency and posted at strategic locations within the facility. P13 stated, "also if they could provide something like fliers or manuals that detail what to do or steps to take in the event of a disaster, that would help." This view was echoed by P10 who stated, "Instructional leaflets laminated and posted at strategic locations within the facility will help inform staff on the basic steps to take when disaster strikes before help arrives."

Security Issues

The issue of security emerged as a concerning subject in the course of the interviews. Some of the staff interviewed expressed serious concern over the lack of security at the facility especially at night. Participant P10 was most vocal about this and stated:

> We have no security here. We should at least have a buzzer where we can buzz people in and out of the building and not just have the doors wide open. Anybody can walk through the front door or the back door anytime, 24/7. We have about 200 ex-felons here, most of them, with the same criminal mentality, but we have no way of keeping us safe. Assigning three staff over 200 guys, I believe, is a disaster waiting to happen.

P11 stated that:

> but as far as with safety or someone coming in, we have really nothing, we don't have security. That's the only thing that gives me concern, even within. If the guys flip, you know, all we have is ourselves. We don't have anything or any form of security to protect us from harm.

Staff Quarters

Provision of staff room(s) within the facility, also featured as a recommendation. Some of the staff interviewed expressed a desire to have staff quarters or stay over-rooms where they can stay in the event that work demand or a disaster event prevents them from going back to their homes. This desire was strongly expressed by participant P3 who said "they need to have a place for staff to stay in the facility during a disaster. This is very important. I slept in my office one day and that was not funny."

The point was echoed by another participant, P1 who said, "one other problem is that we don't have a place to stay here in the facility in case things go bad like during the ice storm." Although hotel rooms were booked, we still needed to be transported to and from there to the facility and that was difficult. Knowing that you have a place to stay and freshen up and food to eat, helps to relax your mind and pushes you to do your best despite how risky."

Access to Supplies

Some of the participants suggested that having greater access to supplies is necessary especially during disaster response. Again, although this point may not directly relate to the research question, it was a legitimate concern raised by at least two

participants. For instance, P13 said, "If we have a designated place with supplies that is accessible to every staff, that would be helpful. Maybe they do, but we neither know nor have access to it. We have to ask for everything we need."

Discrepant Cases

During the process of data analysis for this study, there were no discrepant cases observed. The data collected from all participants conformed to the set standards as indicated in the literature review. There were some notable differences in terms of the way participants in the volunteer category answered some questions, different from the regular staff and this could be seen as a function of the degree of involvement of the former, rather than an aberration from the norm. Therefore, it is safe to suggest that no obvious discrepancies arose from any of the interviews. The data analysis was consistent with the explanations and experiences outlined by the study participants with no conflicts or inconsistences.

Summary

The main focus of chapter 4 was to present the data from the interviews, analyze the data and show how they help answer the research question. The chapter opened with a brief review of the purpose of the study and the research question it sought to answer. I followed this by presenting the setting under which the data were collected as well as a description of participants' demographics. I discussed the process of data collection and followed this with an analysis of the data. I hand-coded the interview data using In vivo constructs which provided insight into thematic patterns following a content analysis. There is a section that reviewed measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data

as indicated in Chapter 3, by addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Also, within the chapter, I addressed the research question as well as the themes that emerged in relation to the questions and the responses from the study participants, and these were discussed under results. I ended the chapter by discussing the issue of discrepant cases where I concluded that none emerged from the study. In Chapter 5, I will present the interpretation of the research findings, a discussion of the study limitations, implications for social change, as well as recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of staff preparedness for disaster response in transitional houses in Texas. The study was informed by the need to direct focus on the safety of residents of transitional houses, a population group whose unequal exposure, marginalization, and social stigma contribute to their vulnerability, making them more likely to be injured or killed during a disaster (see Settembrino, 2017). Available literature I reviewed for this study indicated that whereas studies in disaster preparedness had been conducted among other segments of the vulnerable population groups, there have been no studies on emergency preparedness in transitional houses especially from the perspective of staff. My study was designed to fill this knowledge gap, offer a better understanding of proper emergency preparedness protocol, and provide administrators and policymakers a template for formulating and/or evaluating policies designed to ensure effective emergency preparedness and response in transitional houses.

This was a general qualitative study that relied on semistructured, open-ended interviewing and document review as the main sources of data collection. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, and all were recorded using a digital voice recorder, and then transcribed verbatim into a word document. Once transcribed, all interview transcripts were sent back to the study participants to check for accuracy. Altogether, 14 participants including 11 employees and three volunteers were interviewed for this study, and below is the summary of my findings.

Summary of Findings

The research findings indicated the following key points which will be expanded later:

- All 14 participants demonstrated a basic understanding of the subject of disaster preparedness as expressed in the words and phrases used in their description e.g., "getting ready," "to be prepared," "knowledge."

- Almost all respondents exhibited some type of experience in disaster response operations, deriving from either "participation in drills" or involvement in real-life situations such as "tornadoes."

- Majority of the interviewees believed they had participated in training and exercises exemplified in "CPR trainings," "drills" or "videos."

- Evidence from the interviews suggested the participants had almost zero knowledge about NIMS or any of its training models as contained in the recommended IC training series. This is an important component of disaster preparedness.

- Excerpts from the transcripts indicated there had been no joint training sessions or simulations with other agencies or first responders that may be involved in an emergency operation.

- The study revealed that although participants are aware of the element of risk in their approach at disaster response, with adequate information, risk motivates them to undertake disaster response.

- Most of the participants interviewed believed they were prepared for disaster response as nine of them felt "prepared" while three felt "50% prepared."

- All participants demonstrated knowledge of potential hazards that could constitute a disaster. However, only five indicated "knowledge of what to do" with six stating "unsure" of what to do, while three said they "did not know what to do."

- Document review showed evidence of emergency response plan however, participants' awareness of its existence was lacking.

Interpretation of Findings

This study employed a basic qualitative approach to better understand staff perceptions of disaster preparedness in transitional houses. The basic qualitative approach used semi-structured, open-ended interviewing which allowed participants to share their lived experiences, thereby enriching the data and study findings. The findings confirmed and supported the literature review findings on disaster preparedness, and in some cases, extended these findings. These will be discussed along lines of the major themes that emerged from the study.

Understanding Concept and Experience

The participants demonstrated an understanding of the concept of preparedness and showed some level of experience on the subject. These concepts are considered essential in any preparedness efforts as they conform with one of the basic assumptions of the study viz: "that all participants may have experienced some type of disaster while at the transitional house or may have partaken in the preparation for one." Akbar et al. (2020), theorizing on the relationship between RPT and disaster preparedness, provided a nexus between the two concepts when they identified personal experience and knowledge

of disasters as indicative of the effectiveness of risk perception, concluding that a significant positive influence exists between disaster risk perception and disaster preparedness. This prompted Osorio-de-Castro et al. (2020) to use RPT to demonstrate that knowledge or awareness, perception of risk, as well as consequences, are variables that must be considered in any serious preparation towards disaster response, especially within any vulnerable community. An understanding of what constitutes disaster preparedness is therefore considered a necessary condition for any serious preparation for one. In other words, one cannot engage in any meaningful exercise towards preparedness without an understanding of the concept.

Training and Exercises

Training and exercise is a major component of disaster preparedness and one agreed by most of the participants as central to their perception of readiness. Mc Entire (2018) affirmed that training is a vital component of community preparedness as it helps all those involved in response and recovery to anticipate what could happen and how best to react. The participants interviewed stated that they received periodic training and/or exercises as demonstrated through CPRs, drills, and videos on training models, conforming to the position by Godfrey et al. (2019) that preparedness includes drills and exercises carried out periodically to reduce complacency.

About 10 out of the 14 respondents described their training involvements, from CPRs to drills and video training although almost all the respondents agreed that more training and exercises were needed to get them where they needed to be in terms of preparedness. Participant P11 had said, "I used to complain about how they make us

watch these videos every 6 months. Now I know why, as it has become a part of me. I believe that constancy and repetition lead to perfection." P8 echoed saying, "repetition is the only thing that can get you prepared." This is in tandem with the position of Samimian-Darash and Rotem (2018), who suggested that repetition that characterizes exercises becomes a habit-building, a key to the inculcation of these procedures, making them a kind of "habitus."

It is significant to note that participants P12, P13, and P14 shared a similar perception of their preparedness given their responses from the interviews. Evidence from the transcripts showed that these had the least favorable response in several key areas. For instance, they were the least experienced, received the least amount of training, had absolutely no knowledge of NIMS, never participated in any joint training sessions, and were more concerned about the risk. These three participants were all volunteers versus regular staff.

The significance of this is that while the volunteers were expected to assist regular staff during emergency response operations, they were not included in any preparedness efforts. This omission is at variance with the views of Whittaker et. al (2015), who argued that because volunteers such as parole officers provide much of the additional surge capacity required to respond to emergency disasters, their inclusion in preparedness planning and training in transitional houses is highly encouraged.

NIMS Compliance

NIMS is a national/state provision that requires every organization, no matter how small, to follow certain laid down principles in all emergency operations (DHS, 2008).

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 mandated the creation of the NIMS to be the standard method for managing emergency response operations at all levels of government regardless of incident type, size, or complexity (Hambridge et al., 2017). Following the directive of HSPD-5 under which NIMS was established, every state government officially adopted NIMS through executive order or other policy mechanisms (Hambridge et al., 2017). Consequently, on February 23, 2005, then Governor Perry of Texas issued executive order RP40 which compelled the state of Texas to adopt NIMS for incident management (Texas Department of Public Safety, 2013).

In pursuit of this directive, the ACA (2014), the umbrella organization that guides all adult correctional institutions, compelled its member associations to develop their emergency response plans on the model provided by NIMS. This order ensured the application of NIMS protocol in all aspects of emergency management operations in the state by all agencies and organizations. Therefore, the assumption is that compliance with NIMS training and exercise is a measure of emergency preparedness. NIMS preparedness component is critical to effective incident management as it encompasses all activities conducted before an incident, including planning, training and exercises, personnel qualification, equipment acquisition, and certification standards, and evaluation and revision (FEMA, 2018).

Evidence from the study, however, suggested that participants were neither aware of nor have been trained in NIMS. Almost all the participants denied any knowledge of or training in NIMS. The inference here is that NIMS had not yet been incorporated into the organization's disaster preparedness program. This suggests a flaw in management's

emergency operation procedures, one that omits an integral component of disaster preparedness protocol.

Joint Sessions with Other Agencies

Scholars generally agree that collaboration is a necessary condition for effective response to crises, emergencies, and disasters (Nohrstedt, 2016). Collaboration is a strategy that fits in with disaster response operations, especially in transitional houses which often require the pulling together of agencies that work in concert to ensure effective disaster response. For instance, multiagency collaboration allows all levels of governments and agencies to work together more efficiently and effectively (DHS, 2017). Through this process, agencies such as Red Cross, police departments, EMS, fire departments, faith-based organizations as well as the private sector, all cooperate during disaster preparedness and response. Findings from the data, however, indicated that no such collaborative efforts had taken place either in training or real-life situation. Almost all the participants were certain they had not been part of any collaborative arrangements.

Preparedness

As a theme, preparedness emerged as a gauge of participants' confidence in their readiness for emergency response. Peer-reviewed literature suggested that preparedness implied readying for expected threats including contingency planning, resource management, and mutual aids. Haddow et al. (2017) described it as a state of readiness to respond to a disaster, crisis, or any other type of emergency. As a measure of actions taken prior to a disaster event (Marcino & Gordon, 2018), preparedness is a continuous cycle of planning, organizing, training, equipping, evaluating, and taking corrective

action to ensure effective coordination capable of enhancing capabilities that help to prevent, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of disasters, natural or man-made (Baker & Ludwig, 2016; Essoh & Owoicho-Abutu, 2018; Godfrey et al., 2019; Rotich, 2019). Therefore, preparedness entails more than just drills but must consider the capabilities required across the whole community or organization to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from threats and hazards that pose the greatest risk (Rivera, 2019).

Most participants interviewed for this study believed they were prepared. A total of nine participants felt prepared, two thought they were about 50% prepared, while three believed they were unprepared. Participants who claimed prepared drew their confidence from their participation in drills, CPRs, and videos-their major training tools. Yet, evidence from literature suggested that preparedness encompasses much more than experience or participation in mere drills and CPRs as cited above. It is a continuous process that includes everything from planning, organizing, training, equipping, evaluating, and correcting. It is a holistic approach and not the result of a single variable such as drills.

Communication

Improved communication was one of the findings from the study and affirms the views of previous scholars. Communication has been seen as playing a critical role in emergency response operations. Establishing and maintaining a common operating channel and ensuring accessibility and interoperability are necessary and must form the goal of information management during a disaster (DHS, 2017). The aim here is to ensure

accurate and consistent messaging during disaster which often results in panicky situations hence communication is believed to always pose a challenge during this period Shah et al. (2018). Barnett et al. (2005) used RPT to emphasize this point by maintaining that during tumultuous situations occasioned by disaster events, an information void or even sometimes disjointed or inaccurate supply of it, maybe a potential determinant of risk and ultimately shape staff perception of the risks associated with their roles in such emergency.

Many of the participants argued in support of a more centralized or enhanced communication system. For instance, participant P8 stated, "awareness of procedures is important, management must pass uniform information to both staff and residents, everyone must be on the same page." P2 said, "communication needs to be better. Install intercom system so all can hear instructions at the same time." It is important to note that part of the challenge for increasing preparedness in individuals, communities, and organizations, is to ensure the nature of the threat is well communicated as people are more likely to prepare (and take the risk involved) if the information is accurate and comes from a reliable source to ensure timely and appropriate responses. (Kanakis & McShane, 2016; Rahn et al., 2020).

Study Findings and Theoretical Framework: Risk Perception Theory

The theoretical framework for this study was the RPT. According to the proponents of this theory, RPT should be applied to understand staff perceptions of emergency preparedness, an understanding that can help illuminate their ability and willingness to respond to disasters (Barnett et al., 2005). I used RPT used to gauge the

impact of risk on staff disaster preparedness. Several authors had analyzed this theoretical construct in different ways. For instance, Wang et al. (2018) described risk perception as emblematic of uncertainty regarding possible negative consequences, or a perceived likelihood of a hazard event taking place. This perceived uncertainty often acts as the engine that drives the preparedness efforts of the community or organization to put in place steps to undertake to mitigate the impact if it does occur.

Rahm and Reddick (2011) believed that high levels of perceived risk can be associated with increased preparedness efforts, while others like Horita et al. (2018) thought to the contrary, arguing that awareness of risk is not associated with increased levels of preparedness. Notwithstanding the prism from which one views this relationship, this view of positive link is in sync with the claim by some of the participants interviewed (e.g., P4, P6, P8, and P9) who stated that risk motivates rather than discourage them. Participant P8 for instance, stated that "risk actually helps you prepare more especially when you are well informed about the true situation so you know what you are up against." Others such as P9, were even more definitive stating that "risk motivates me if I am informed of what is going on by the authority. It challenges me to do whatever needs to be done to help the clients."

And so, against the assumption that the perception of risk deters participation in disaster response operations, evidence from the study suggested otherwise. While staff recognized the existence of risk, they were not deterred by it, but instead were motivated in some cases, so long as they had adequate information about the riskiness of the

situation. This finding is similar to Akbar et al.'s (2020) perception that the risk of danger

is the single most important element that drives disaster preparedness.

Comparison with Documentary Analysis

As part of the data analysis, I reviewed an internal document-an emergency plan-

made available to me during the data collection process. A critical analysis of this

document suggested a detailed articulation of the emergency response plan which if

applied, should guarantee a successful emergency response operation for the facility.

However, when compared with the excerpts from the participant interviews, it was

discovered that whereas the participants almost unanimously endorsed "training and

exercise" as one of, if not, the most significant themes that emerged from the interviews,

at no place in the reviewed document was training mentioned as a subject. Therefore, it is

possible to infer that the document merely exists on paper to satisfy audit requirements as

the staff is barely aware of its existence.

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Limitations of the Study

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As is common in most qualitative studies, often the honest intentions of the

researcher are limited by certain extraneous circumstances hence this study has certain

limitations which may in some ways, impede its trustworthiness.

First, the study was limited only to state privately contracted transitional houses in

Texas, and of the eight that fall into this category, this study focused on just one. This

scope, while considered sufficient for a qualitative study, maybe deemed inadequate in

terms of generalizability. Secondly, purposeful sampling strategy adopted in selecting

participants, meant that selection depended entirely on the subjective judgment of the

officials who helped with the selection. This may have affected the quality of certain participants in terms of knowledge of the subject and hence their ability to provide valuable information. For instance, in the course of the interviews, it became necessary to seek additional participants in part, for the above reason.

This study was conducted at the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic with its attendant implications. For instance, the field study was originally designed to be conducted at two locations of the organization. The idea for a second location was shelved as the facility was said to be on lockdown at the time. By the same token, at the main facility where the study was conducted, a focus group was discouraged due to the need to abide by CDC restrictions regarding the clustering of persons. Therefore, I relied solely on individual face-to-face interviews complemented by document review, for my data collection.

Another limiting factor was the tendency for "recall bias" which results when participants are unable to provide an accurate recollection of past events. The participants obviously shared their experiences from past disaster events, and although they were able to narrate the events as best as they could, there was a possibility of forgetting actual and specific events or even providing self-serving responses, leading to a recall bias (Patton, 2002). When this happens, it could lead to either overestimation or underestimation of the results of the study.

Recommendations

This basic qualitative study was informed by the compelling need to direct focus on the safety of residents of transitional houses. In addition to offering a better understanding of proper emergency preparedness protocol, the study provides

administrators and policymakers a template for formulating and/or evaluating policies designed to ensure effective emergency preparedness and response in transitional houses. Thus, in arriving at these outcomes, the study revealed several aspects that call for further research viz:

Recommendation for Future Research

In order to paint a more complete picture of disaster preparedness as it relates to staff in transitional houses, it is recommended that this study be expanded to include all the state-contracted transitional houses in Texas. Including other transitional houses will help broaden the scope and result in a significantly better understanding of their disaster preparedness. It is equally recommended that a similar study be conducted to include shelters and treatment facilities as these equally house vulnerable groups needing professional help and care to ensure their safety during disaster periods.

Additionally, scholars and practitioners identified four phases of emergency management to include: mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery (DHS, 2017; Haddow et al., 2017; Sylves, 2019; Tucker, 2014). This study focused on just one-the preparedness phase. Further studies are required in other phases such as mitigation, response, and recovery in order to have a better understanding of staff engagement in each or all of these phases during disaster events, an understanding that can help facilitate staff ability and willingness to participate in disaster operations in transitional houses.

The study identified communication as one of the themes that emerged from the findings. It however did not elaborate on its role in ensuring seamless disaster preparedness or the barriers that prevent this. Having communication and collaborative

efforts among all levels of organization including management, employees, volunteers, and residents, could yield positive outcomes for disaster response operations. Yet, often times, these positive outcomes are lost to shrouded or unclear information or communication channels. Therefore, further research is needed to explore the barriers that impede consistent communication and collaborative strategies among the organizational levels in disaster preparedness in transitional houses. Knowledge of such barriers could potentially inform disaster planners and allow for the development of strategies that could both eliminate the barriers and foster communication and collaboration among disaster responders.

NIMS compliance was made a requirement by all agencies, organizations and all levels of government engaged in emergency operations, following HSPD-5 under which it was established. Consequently, on February 23, 2005, the then Governor Perry issued executive order RP40 which compelled the state of Texas to adopt NIMS for incident management, an order that ensured the application of NIMS protocol in all aspects of emergency management operations in the state by all agencies and organizations. (TDPS, 2013). Findings from the study however, indicated a complete unawareness of NIMS, or its application in disaster preparedness regimen. Further research is therefore recommended to examine the barriers responsible for the non-application of NIMS protocol in emergency operations in transitional houses and ways to get them to comply.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for social change are addressed under the following sub-sections: (a) positive social change (b) how the study addressed the gap in literature and (c) Study's recommendations for practice.

Positive Social Change

The study offers administrators and policymakers, a clearer understanding of the preparedness protocols, including training and exercises, as outlined in the National Incident Management System [NIMS] and adopted by the American Correctional Association [ACA]. This understanding may help advance staff disaster preparedness by providing them the foundation for effective incident response and management and a template for formulating and/or evaluating policies designed to ensure effective emergency preparedness response in transitional houses. Such policy changes may be adopted by other transitional houses thereby potentially reducing safety concerns of the residents during disasters.

How Study Addressed Gap in Literature

The gap in the literature that preceded this study, was the apparent lack of studies on the subject of disaster preparedness in transitional houses. This dearth in literature and the need to address it, was in part, the '*raison* d'*être*' for this study. Therefore, one of the social change implications of this study was in helping to fill this knowledge gap via its contribution in expanding the existing body of knowledge and offering rich resources and data that can aid future research. In other words, it is my hope that the extensive research

that went into this study, will provide a useful resource that may aid future research on this important subject of disaster preparedness.

Recommendations for Practice

Training emerged as one of the biggest findings from this study. Despite the majority of the participants claiming participation in drills as evidence of training, all the respondents mentioned training when asked for suggestions on how to improve their preparedness. The insufficiency of training as evidenced from the study, cannot be overemphasized as findings from the study indicate a need for a more structured training regimen, preferably by outside professionals. This need agrees with the findings of previous scholars on the subject. According to Haddow et al. (2017) training of emergency response personnel is paramount to their ability to conduct the tasks required of them. Training is a vital component of community preparedness as it helps all those involved in response and recovery to anticipate what could happen and how best to react (Mc Entire, 2018).

Scholars such as Kirkpatrick & Bryan (2007) attributed part of the reasons for failure during Hurricane Katrina, to the uneven provision of training to staff by some agencies. The authors found out that whereas certain agencies offered routine and comprehensive training, preparatory to hurricane emergencies, others did not provide any training, or where they did, they did so in a haphazard manner. Therefore, adopting an impromptu or extemporaneous approach to emergency response in any organization such as transitional houses can be counterproductive and should be avoided, if necessary. This is so because, neglecting to train and exercise, while saving cost in the short term, could

prove costly or lead to higher expenditures in the long term, especially if agencies fail to adequately respond to a real-world event (Williams, 2011). Increased training and exercises will help position staff to deal with disasters more effectively in transitional houses if and when they occur.

Associated with training also, is the need to integrate volunteers in agencies' preparedness programs. Evidence from the study suggested that while volunteers, including parole officers, are often asked to assist at the transitional houses thereby providing much of the additional surge capacity required to respond to emergency disasters, their inclusion in preparedness planning and training in transitional houses is oftentimes abysmal, if not completely absent. Succinctly put, the study revealed a high degree of underutilization of volunteers in disaster preparedness protocols in transitional houses. For instance, the study revealed that participants P12, P13, and P14 [all volunteers] were the least experienced, received the least amount of training, had absolutely no knowledge of NIMS, never participated in any joint training sessions, and were more concerned about the risk. Strikingly, these were all volunteers. Therefore, it is suggested that planners and policymakers consider integrating volunteers in their disaster preparedness in order to fully maximize their presence and potentials during disasters as well as ensure safety for all. Incorporating these volunteer corps will help provide a more formidable response team ready to handle disaster issues in transitional houses.

Communication was another area of concern that emerged from the findings. Previous studies have suggested that communication plays a critical role in emergency response operations. Many of the participants harped on the above point during the

interviews, advocating a more centralized or enhanced communication system. They linked their perception of risk to effective communication which results in clear or uniform messages. Succinctly put, staffers exhibited greater willingness to undertake emergency response despite the risk involved, once they are adequately informed about the actual situation of things.

Proponents of the risk perception theory which served as the theoretical framework for this study had argued in favor of effective communication and passing of warning messages during a disaster period. They relied on the communication-human information processing (C-HIP) model, constructed by (Conzola & Wogalter, 2001; Wogalter, 2006) as cited by (Rahn et al., 2020). According to Rahn et al., the C-HIP model looked at the communication and processing of warning information with respect to disasters and concluded that warning messages are a means to inform about risk, thus making risk perception an important part of information processing. Studies such as the above, have shown that in the likely event of the occurrence of hazards, warning messages can help prevent or mitigate various forms of damages by communicating risks, giving information, and recommending protective actions. It is therefore pertinent to recommend that authorities invest more in the provision of uniform information systems aimed at communicating the same messages, to everyone at the same time.

Collaboration through joint simulation with other agencies or first responders likely to be involved in an emergency response operation also emerged as an area of interest. Undertaking periodic simulation with other agencies such as the police, firefighters, EMS, etc., can contribute towards strengthening an organization's disaster

preparedness. Previous scholars agreed that multi-agency collaboration allows all levels of governments and agencies to work together more efficiently and effectively during emergencies (DHS, 2017). Yet, evidence from this study indicated a total lack of collaborative effort in their disaster preparedness program hence it is a recommendation of this research that provision be made for the inclusion of joint collaboration with agencies such as those described above in preparation for disaster response.

Proper management and or/coordination of residents of transitional houses during disasters could yield positive outcomes for the larger society. Ensuring the safety of residents of transitional houses during disaster periods through staff preparedness will help guarantee the safety of lives and property within the host communities. Given that residents of these transitional houses are mainly previously incarcerated persons released on parole or probation, their criminogenic tendencies could suggest an inclination towards the commission of additional crimes if not properly managed during emergencies. Keeping them safe in a secured environment helps minimize this tendency.

Conclusion

Disaster preparedness represents a critical component of the emergency management cycle and involves an integrated combination of factors including planning, training & exercises, funding, and private sector engagement, etc. The social and economic impact of disasters, whether natural or man-made, cannot be underestimated. Whereas organizations and/or communities may not fully predict the occurrence of a disaster, especially the natural type, due to lack of human capacity to control nature, they can at least prepare and equip individuals to deal with its occurrence and mitigate its

anticipated and predictable disastrous effects. How prepared such communities or

organizations are in dealing with disasters, could determine their resiliency in mitigating

the impact of such disasters. This study explored the perception of staff of a transitional

house in Texas with regard to disaster preparedness, the goal of which was to provide a

better understanding of their state of readiness to conduct emergency operations. And

although the staff perceived themselves as generally prepared, evidence from the study

indicated a compelling need for greater investment in training and exercises in order to

get staff better prepared to deal with disaster events in the transitional houses and

elsewhere.

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Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Patrick Onuoha. I am a Parole Officer with the Texas Department of

Criminal Justice [tdcj], and also a doctoral student at Walden University. As part of the

requirements for a PhD in Public Policy & Administration, I am conducting a qualitative

study entitled "Exploring Perceptions of Staff Preparedness for Emergency Response in

Transitional Houses in North Texas."

This correspondence is to formally request your permission to interview some

selected staff members in your Dallas and Fort Worth locations. Evidence indicate that

whereas studies on emergency preparedness have been previously conducted in several

other fields, there have been no studies on disaster preparedness in transitional houses

especially from the perspective of staff (employees and volunteers). This study will

explore staff preparedness in handling disaster situations at the transitional houses.

Results from the study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge. Importantly, it

will enable administrators and policymakers gain a better understanding of proper

emergency preparedness protocol, which will aid in formulating and/or evaluating

policies geared towards ensuring effective emergency preparedness response in

transitional houses.

Recruitment for this study will be purposive with the first step being to contact

staff members who indicate interest to participate, by phone or email, to determine their

eligibility. Selected staffers will then be scheduled for interview to complete the consent

process and be debriefed about the study. Thereafter, interview dates, time and location will be mutually agreed upon. My goal is to interview a total of 12-16 participants, preferably in an office within the facility for convenience's sake.

I will conduct interviews in two phases-individual and focus groups). I will interview each participant using specified questions (sample enclosed). Each interview will be audio recorded and last approximately 30 minutes, while the focus group will last about 1hr. At all times I will use pseudo names and the organization's name will not appear anywhere in the report. Also, all information will be kept confidential and stored on a password-protected USB drive.

Please kindly assist by granting me permission to conduct my interviews at your facilities. I will make a copy of the report available to you. For further questions, I can be reached at (xxx)xxx-xxxx.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Patrick Onuoha.

Appendix B: Recruitment Flier

Research Student Looking for Participants with Knowledge of and/or Participation in Disaster Preparedness.

There is a study to explore staff perception of disaster preparedness in transitional houses in North Texas. Results from this study could help administrators and policymakers gain a better understanding of proper emergency preparedness protocol which will aid in formulating and/or evaluating policies geared towards ensuring effective emergency preparedness response in transitional houses. For this study, you are invited to discuss your knowledge of and/or participation in disaster preparedness.

This study is part of the doctoral study for Patrick Onuoha, a Ph.D. student at Walden University.

About the Study:

- One 30-minute one-on-one interview

- To protect your privacy and ensure confidentiality, no names will be required.

- Interviews will be audio recorded for transcript capture

Volunteers must meet the following requirements:

- Must be 18 years of age or older

- Must be a staffer or volunteer [PO]

- Should be knowledgeable or have participated in disaster preparedness.

- Must <u>NOT</u> be a resident.

To volunteer, please call /text: xxx-xxx-xxxx to prequalify.

Appendix C: Letter of Invitation

Hello,

I hope this invitation finds you well. My name is Patrick Onuoha. I am in the Walden

University PhD program. As part of my dissertation, I chose to pursue a qualitative

research study on disaster preparedness in transitional houses with a focus on staff

perception. I am hoping you will be interested in participating in my study. The interview

process will include completing an informed consent form (I 'll email this to you), and

allowing me to conduct face-to-face (individual and focus group interviews), preferably

in an office space within your facility. The whole process should take no more than 30/60

minutes of your time.

IRB approval # for this study is xx-xx-xx-xxxxxxx. Please let me know if you would like

to participate. I would like to begin the process by (date) and finish the interview by

(date). You may contact me by phone on xxx-xxx-xxxx or email:

Patrick.Onuoha@waldenu.edu, if you have any questions.

Thank you.

Patrick Onuoha.

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. Please can you tell me what you understand by disaster preparedness?

2. Tell me about any disaster response you have taken part in, either at the transitional house or elsewhere.

3. Could you please tell me about any trainings and exercises have you received as part of disaster preparedness-*prompts*

4. Compliance with the National Incident Management System NIMS, is critical in training and exercise; have you been trained in NIMS preparedness process?

5. Describe a situation in which you have participated in a joint training and exercises with other first responders including police, fire fighters, EMS etc., as part of disaster preparedness.

6. Disaster preparedness is often associated with risk. How does the perception of risk influence your preparedness efforts? *Prompt.*

7. How prepared do you believe you are to undertake emergency response at the transitional house, and what do you feel is needed to help you be better prepared?

8. Describe some of the potential hazards that could affect your organization, and the actions to be taken against each type? Please explain.

9. What improvements will you like to see as a means of improving disaster preparedness in your workplace?

10. Is there anything further you wish to share with me on this topic?