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Thomas A. Leitko
Alfred University

David R. Rudy
Morehead State University

Steven A. Peterson
Alfred University

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LOSS NOT NEED:
THE ETHICS OF RELIEF GIVING IN NATURAL DISASTERS¹

Thomas A. Leitko
Alfred University

David R. Rudy
Morehead State University

Steven A. Peterson
Alfred University

ABSTRACT

The social ethics of relief giving (the bases on which relief ought to be given) in natural disaster situations are explored through a case study of public reactions to Red Cross activities. Red Cross policies and public reactions to them are reviewed, and survey data pertaining to attitudes toward the Red Cross and toward relief giving in natural disasters of residents of a western New York county are presented. Specifically, public satisfaction with present Red Cross distribution policies is explored, and public perceptions of "loss vs need" as bases for relief giving are examined. Although there are some qualifications, findings show a large segment of the public supporting bases other than "need" for the distribution of disaster services. This is especially true for those who have actually received disaster aid. Implications are that the public does not always support a redistributive role for relief giving, but in some cases with some populations expects relief giving to reinforce the status quo.

Introduction

Public dependence is nearly universal, but social response to it is not. Social expectations regarding "relief giving" (who should get how much) vary according to the circumstances causing dependence and the population involved.² Because relief giving is usually associated with social welfare, however, this variation has generally gone unnoticed and uninvestigated. In the case of social welfare, "need" is supposed to determine eligibility for relief (the needy being those who cannot work to support themselves and who have no other resources on which they can depend). Social welfare is a limited sample of all relief-giving, however, in that it is a societal response particular to the dependence of the lower and working classes, a dependence which is mostly due to vulnerability to unfortuitous economic circumstances (recession, automation, inflation, etc.). As well as the lower classes, however, the middle and upper classes also periodically receive re-

lief. Also, as well as through economic processes, large segments of the population may also become dependent through other classes of disasters, including epidemic disease, war, political upheaval and riots, and natural disasters. The purpose of this paper is to "expand the sample" of expectations for relief giving by analyzing the social response to dependence produced by natural disasters and to compare public expectations for relief giving in natural disasters to those in economic disasters. Specifically, this will be a case study of public expectations for relief-giving from the Red Cross in the case of natural disasters.

Social Welfare Giving

Poverty is likely to be viewed in the United States as a status into which the individual has voluntarily drifted rather than one in which he or she was forced by economic or social circumstances (Matza and Miller, 1976). As such, poverty is seen to be a result of indolence, and relief giving a response that potentially reinforces indolence. Reputable dependence, in this case, is therefore limited to those who have been excluded from the expectation to work for other reasons. The very old, the very young, the disabled, and to some extent women are among those who can legitimately claim social welfare. Even in these cases, all other resources and possible means of support must be exhausted. Rarely are able workers deemed reputably eligible. Direct relief is given to these people only in case of severe economic disaster, and then only for a brief period until indirect work relief programs can be devised. Where social welfare relief is given, then, it is given sparingly, it is made difficult to obtain, and those who accept it are stigmatized as morally inferior and untrustworthy.

As a societal response to dependence, then, social welfare is given to those in economic need; those who are "legitimately" unable to work and otherwise unable to support themselves. It is expected to maintain the pauperized individual or family at a minimal level. Through the use of minimal support, strict eligibility rules, harassment and stigma, the recipient is expected to be forced back into the labor force (Piven and Cloward, 1971).

Natural and Economic Disasters

Tornados, hurricanes, floods, droughts, blizzards and earthquakes, as well as economic disasters, regularly force large sections of the population into positions of dependence by destroying property, causing death, and disrupting the economy. Natural disasters have somewhat different effects on the social system than do economic disasters, however. First, natural disasters affect the various socio-economic strata more equally than do economic disasters. Although those in the lower classes are sometimes more likely to be exposed to the disaster conditions (poorer people often live in low lands and on flood plains, for example), and middle and upper-middle class people are more likely to be insured against loss, all classes are subject to severe financial loss, death, deprivation and psychological trauma.

Second, natural disasters are generally acute while economic disasters are generally chronic. Natural disasters are immediately visible, quick in their onset, dramatic in their effects, and quick to subside. In comparison, economic disasters are often gradual in onset, difficult to identify, and sometimes ambiguous in their effects.

Finally, natural disasters are viewed as "acts of God". They are seen as uncontrollable outside forces which reduce the population to a position of dependence as opposed to dependence which is produced by voluntary drift.

As well as differing from economic disasters in terms of their effects on the social system, natural disasters also differ from economic disasters in the way in which society is organized to respond in relief giving. First, disaster relief giving is much more decentralized and less bureaucratized than is social welfare. Here, private agencies still hold major responsibility for collecting and distributing relief. As opposed to the relatively centralized federal social welfare system, a variety of private agencies compete to provide disaster relief, and local agencies within the national organizations often have a considerable amount of control over their own activities. Often, where government funds are given, they are funneled through private agencies. The government's major role, however, is in providing long term financial assistance through more traditional welfare programs.

Second, relief giving in natural disasters, because it is private, relies heavily on voluntary contributions of money, supplies, and labor, where social welfare is collected and distributed under the auspices of federal authority.

Finally, relief giving in natural disasters is much less professionalized than is social welfare. Natural disaster organizations use a large amount of part-time and voluntary labor which have minimal training. Also, there is little professional training for paid staffs, and boards of directors are often appointed according to their status in the community rather than their disaster-related skills (See Form and Nosow, 1958:187-216).

In summary, natural disasters are less class specific in their impact, have more recognizable effects, and are less likely to produce dependence which is blamed on the individual than are economic disasters. Also, the organization of disaster relief giving is decentralized, nonprofessional, and supported through voluntary giving. The implication is that private relief organizations are unable to use bureaucratic and professional authority and indirect and involuntary funding mechanisms to insulate themselves from public opinion regarding who should get how much disaster relief.

The Red Cross: A Case Study in the Ethics of Relief Giving

Perhaps the best evidence concerning public expectations regarding relief giving in natural disasters comes from studies of public reactions to the policies of the American Red Cross. The Red Cross is the major provider of direct relief dur-

ing and immediately after natural disasters in the United States. Until the early 1960s, the Red Cross was the primary source of disaster relief for individuals and families. At this time, responsibility for much of the more extensive and long term financial relief was assumed by the federal government. The Red Cross' current efforts then, are aimed at restoring individuals' and families' ability to resume functioning independently through the provision of food, clothing, emergency shelter, small loans and referral of victims to governmental and other nongovernmental sources of aid. The Red Cross remains very visible to disaster victims, then, and it is not surprising that it is identified by the public as being the major provider of disaster relief even beyond its actual activities and responsibilities (Harris Poll, 1976).

Most of the studies of public reactions to Red Cross relief giving policies come from the period before the 1960s when the Red Cross was the primary source of aid. During this period (and up until 1969) it was the Red Cross policy to attempt to distribute services on the basis of "need". This involved the use of extensive interviews aimed at determining the extent of victims' personal resources and the extent to which those resources would have to be supplemented in order to enable the individual or family to again be able to function independently (Form and Nosow, 1958:207). As a result of this policy, varying levels of aid would be given to victims depending on their ability to support themselves. Disaster relief, then, was given out in a similar manner to that of social welfare relief.

In implementing these policies, however, the Red Cross managed to incur a considerable amount of animosity from the public. Part of this was from the working class victims who resented the bureaucratic red tape and the intrusion into privacy involved with eligibility interviews (Form and Nosow, 1958:207). More telling, though, is that middle class victims resented the "need not loss" basis on which relief was distributed (Bates, *et. al.*, 1963: 50; Form and Nosow, 1958:207; Barton, 1970:297). More specifically, middle class victims were offended because they expected relief to correspond to their status in the community, and to their losses due to the disaster, while this was not a common complaint among the working and lower classes. Middle class victims, that is, tended to demand relatively larger amounts of relief to correspond to their losses due to disasters, regardless of their abilities to support themselves in an absolute sense. Rather than as an undeserved gift, then, disaster victims seemed to view relief as a corrective to a naturally induced injustice.

The upshot is that overall, the public does not see the welfare model of relief giving to be appropriate for natural disaster. Eligibility interviews required too much disclosure of information, and standards dictated that one be pauperized to qualify for aid. The public felt, rather, that disaster relief should help them recoup their losses, or at least not differentially help those who had lost less.

Perhaps public dissatisfaction with Red Cross relief giving reached its peak in 1969 during Hurricane Camille. Hurricane Camille was a major disaster to which

the response by the Federal Government as well as the Red Cross was judged to be inadequate by a Senatorial committee. The Red Cross, for example, was asked to leave Pass Christian, North Carolina, probably the city hit hardest by the hurricane. Also, some elements of the public charged the Red Cross with discriminatory giving; particularly with giving more aid to poorer victims. Characteristic of the complaints were: "The Red Cross only gave to the extremely poor" or "helped people who didn't need it" or "Red Cross based contributions on 'need' which puts it in a welfare system." "The Red Cross should have helped all people..." "They didn't help me because I rent my home and a good-paying job..." ("Federal Response___," 1970:1325).

In response to these charges the Red Cross altered its relief giving policies for natural disasters. First, it standardized the rules according to which relief would be given. Thus everyone would deal out disaster relief according to fixed formulas, eliminating the discretionary judgment of workers. Second, rather than basing the amount of aid given on "need", which would be determined by an eligibility interview, the amount of aid given would be uniform, varying according to the number of individuals in the family. Further, all families in the disaster area would be deemed qualified to receive aid.³

The Red Cross response to complaints of discriminatory giving, then, was to move away from the social welfare model of relief-giving toward a policy based on universal eligibility (for disaster victims) and equal shares in terms of the amount of aid given. However, no direct studies of the public response to this modified policy have been done. General opinion surveys concerning the Red Cross indicate that the number of public complaints about all Red Cross services have declined since 1969 and that specific complaints about unfairness in relief giving are not among the dominant charges made (Harris Poll, 1976). This would seem to indicate that where relief is given equally to all (regardless of need) the public is likely to perceive it as fairly distributed.

Hypotheses

It was earlier suggested that the social response to dependence varies with the circumstances and the population involved. In the case of disaster relief, the circumstances are viewed as "accidental" and a broad spectrum of the population is involved, whereas in the case of welfare relief dependence is viewed as voluntary and mostly the lower and working classes are involved. The bases of public support and the perceived bases for relief giving, then, should vary between the two. More specifically, it can be hypothesized that disaster relief should receive more public support than social welfare relief. That is, relief giving in natural disaster situations should be perceived as more legitimate than relief giving in economic disasters.

Second, it was suggested that social welfare relief is expected to be allocated on the basis of need, e.g. to those who legitimately cannot support themselves. On the basis of a case study of public reactions to Red Cross disaster relief giving, however, it can be hypothesized that loss or equality, rather than

need, should be perceived by the public as the appropriate basis for relief giving in natural disasters. Following this, there should be few complaints from those who have received disaster aid concerning discriminatory giving in that current Red Cross policies distribute aid equally.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected by telephone interviews of residents of a county in Western New York in March, 1979. The county referred to is the proximate service area of a local Red Cross referred to in the study. The area is subject to periodic flooding and harsh winter conditions, and as such is an area in which the Red Cross is fairly active in providing disaster-related services.

For data collection, a two stage sampling design was used. First, households were drawn randomly from a recent telephone directory corresponding to the area in question. Within households, a quota sampling technique was used which tied the adult respondent to the number of male and female adults in the household (Backstrom and Hursh, 1963). Calling was done in the late morning, the afternoon, and in the evening. Of 595 households that were randomly sampled and contacted, 208 refused to cooperate and 387 completed the interview for a response rate of 65%. Refusals to cooperate did not seem to be systematic. Reasons given for non-participation varied widely, ranging from "not enough time" and "dislike of interviews" to "illiterate and cannot understand" and "deaf and cannot hear well enough."

Despite precautions, a disproportionately large number of women were interviewed (70%). This was partly because the quota sampling technique, given the average family size in the area, disproportionately selected women; partly because of the somewhat larger proportion of women in the population; and partly because women were somewhat more likely to cooperate than men. The age, income and educational characteristics of the sample, on the other hand, seemed to be reasonably representative of the population.

Findings

To begin with, it was suggested that public support for disaster relief would be greater than public support for welfare relief. To gauge public support, respondents were asked to rate disaster relief (helping victims of hurricanes, floods, or other natural disasters) and welfare-relief (providing food, shelter and etc. for the poor and needy) as very important, important, or unimportant community services. Results are presented in Table 1. Although few respondents thought that either service was unimportant, respondents were more supportive of disaster than welfare services. Over half (60%) of the respondents rated disaster services as very important compared to one third (34%) who rated welfare services to be very important.

Table 1: Public Support for Disaster and Welfare Relief Giving

	Very Important	Important	Unimportant
Disaster	60.1% (217)	37.7% (136)	2.2% (8)
Welfare	33.6 (119)	59.0 (209)	7.3 (26)

Table 2 presents the percentage of respondents perceiving disaster and welfare services to be very important broken down by respondents' family income, education, age, and gender. These data characterize the structure of public support for the two kinds of relief giving. Although the overall patterns of support for relief giving remain the same within categories, with disaster relief being perceived to be more important than welfare relief, there are marked variations. Support for disaster relief is relatively stable across all categories. The only variations in the otherwise broad base of public support is that males and those with less education are somewhat less supportive of disaster services.

Table 2: Public Support for Disaster and Welfare Relief by Income, Education, Age and Gender (% Very Important)

	<u>Disaster</u>		<u>Welfare</u>	
<u>Income</u>				
5,000	61%	(28)	39%	(17)
5-9,999	54	(33)	34	(22)
10-14,999	65	(34)	36	(18)
15-19,999	60	(48)	34	(27)
20-24,999	63	(20)	30	(9)
25-29,999	54	(14)	23	(6)
30 and over	61	(11)	29	(5)
<u>Education</u>				
Less Than High School	40%	(21)	35%	(18)
High School Grad	63	(100)	37	(57)
Some College	59	(41)	25	(17)
College Grad	67	(36)	33	(17)
<u>Age</u>				
Up to 35	62%	(88)	40%	(58)
35-49	59	(49)	30	(25)
50 and over	59	(79)	28	(35)
<u>Gender</u>				
Male	52%	(56)	26%	(28)
Female	65	(160)	38	(90)

For welfare relief, on the other hand, the structure of support is somewhat specialized. Similar to disaster relief, females are more supportive of services than males. For welfare relief, however, those with less income, those who are younger, and to some extent, those with less education are more supportive of services. Disaster services, therefore, receive a higher and broader level of public support than welfare services. Also, there is some tendency for welfare services to receive greater support from those on the lower end of the socio-economic continuum, at the lower end of the life-cycle ladder, and in the less powerful gender role (e.g., those in subordinate statuses).

The structures of public support for disaster and welfare relief are different, perhaps suggesting that expectations for disaster relief giving will be different also. It was suggested earlier that public expectations for disaster relief-giving would be based on loss or equal amounts rather than need (the criterion for social welfare). Respondents were asked "Which of the following statements best describes how you personally feel disaster relief should be given to victims? 1) People who have the most need (who are least able to support themselves) should get the most aid; 2) People who have lost the most (who have lost the most money's worth in possessions) in a natural disaster should get the most aid; and 3) All victims should get the same amount of aid." Results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Perceived Basis for Disaster Relief Giving

Bases for Relief Giving			
<u>Need</u>	<u>Loss</u>	<u>Equal Amounts</u>	<u>Total</u>
55.4%	14.4%	30.2%	100%
(189)	(49)	(103)	(341)

Contrary to expectations, the majority of the respondents perceived need to be the appropriate basis for disaster relief giving. Over half (55%) claimed aid should be given on the basis of need (to those least able to support themselves), while one third (30%) favored equal amounts and one sixth (14%) favored loss (those who have lost the most due to the disaster). The structure of public support for need, loss and equal amounts is also rather unvarying. Table 4 presents respondents' perceptions of bases for disaster relief giving broken down by income, education, age, and gender. Curiously, men are more supportive of need as a basis of giving than women. The only place that loss and equal amounts combined represent a majority of the respondents, however, is in the very high income category and the very low education category. This perhaps suggests that if the middle class is unsupportive of the welfare model of discriminatory giving, it is a segment of the middle class characterized by status inconsistency (high income and low educational achievement) and status insecurity.

Table 4: Perceived Basis for Disaster Relief Giving by Income, Education, Age and Gender

<u>Income</u>	<u>Need</u>	<u>Loss</u>	<u>Equal</u>	<u>Amounts</u>
Less than \$5,000	59% (26)	9% (4)	32%	(14)
5-9,999	60 (31)	13 (7)	27	(14)
10-14,999	54 (28)	15 (8)	31	(16)
15-19,999	56 (44)	18 (14)	27	(21)
20-24,999	59 (19)	9 (3)	31	(10)
25-29,999	54 (13)	17 (4)	29	(7)
30 and over	42 (8)	11 (2)	47	(9)
<u>Education</u>				
Less Than High School	37% (19)	22% (11)	41%	(21)
High School Grad	57 (86)	14 (21)	29	(44)
Some College	66 (46)	11 (8)	23	(16)
College Grad	60 (32)	11 (6)	28	(15)
<u>Age</u>				
0-34	54% (72)	11% (15)	35%	(46)
35-49	56 (46)	16 (13)	28	(23)
50-98	57 (74)	16 (21)	26	(34)
<u>Gender</u>				
Male	60% (65)	13% (14)	27%	(29)
Female	53 (124)	15 (35)	32	(74)

Also used to gauge public expectations for disaster relief giving were questions pertaining to public reactions to Red Cross disaster relief giving activities. Since approximately 1969, Red Cross policy has been to distribute relief on the basis of equal amounts and almost universal eligibility. Respondents were asked (if they had received disaster aid in the past 10 years): "How well do you think the Red Cross performed its service in this case?" and "If you have received disaster aid from the Red Cross and were dissatisfied with their performance, why were you dissatisfied?" Table 5 presents these results.

Table 5: Satisfaction with Red Cross Disaster Relief

<u>Performed Extremely Well or Very Well</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Just Fair or Poorly</u>	<u>Total</u>
84% (27)	6% (2)	9% (3)	100% (32)

Approximately 8% of the respondents had received disaster aid. Of these 84% expressed that the Red Cross had performed its services either extremely well or very well. Only 3 individuals, in fact, rated the Red Cross performance just fair or poor. Also, only 3 specific complaints were received about the disaster ser-

vices, and none of these was related to charges of discriminatory giving.

Despite the fact that the majority of respondents claim that need should be the basis for disaster giving, then, those who have received disaster aid are highly satisfied with the service and have no complaints about the basis on which aid is distributed. While the former finding implies that disaster relief is expected to be distributed in a manner similar to that of welfare relief, the latter finding implies that, indeed, individuals expect disaster relief to be distributed differently.

One explanation of these discrepant findings is that need may be the socially appropriate answer, or the answer given by those who are idealistic and inexperienced with natural disasters. Some support for this argument, in fact, does exist. Table 6 presents data comparing respondents' perceived bases for disaster relief giving by whether or not they have received disaster aid. From these data, it is clear that those who have received aid are less likely to favor need as a basis for giving than those who have not. Over half (54.5%) of those who have received disaster aid, in fact, perceive either loss or equality as the appropriate basis for giving.

Table 6: Perceived Basis for Disaster Relief Giving
by Experience With Disaster Services

	<u>Disaster Relief Recipient</u>		<u>Non-Recipient</u>	
Need	45.4%	(15)	54.4%	(168)
Loss	21.2	(7)	13.8	(41)
Equal Amounts	33.3	<u>(11)</u> (33)	29.9	<u>(89)</u> (298)

Discussion

Although the evidence is not definite, the hypotheses presented seem to have support. First, disaster relief giving is more legitimate than is welfare relief. Public support for disaster relief giving is higher among a more broadly based public. Further, the public expects disaster relief to be given out on a basis different than that of welfare. Although the majority of the public in general chose "need" as a basis for disaster relief giving, those who had actually received disaster aid preferred either "equal amounts" or "loss". Further, the vast majority of those receiving aid were well satisfied with the Red Cross' performance and no complaints pertaining to discriminatory giving were registered. Thus the Red Cross policy of universal eligibility and equal amounts for giving seem acceptable to the public in practice. Although the general public may tend to transfer the welfare model of relief giving to disaster situations, then, those with experience in natural disaster, who would have more defined expectations concerning who should get what, are likely to choose bases for giving other than need.

As a social response to dependence, then, disaster relief is unlike that of social welfare relief. Whether this is due to the character of the event causing dependence, the character of the recipient population, or the extent and nature of the relief, disaster relief seems to be regarded by the public as compensation for loss rather than as an undeserved gift. Whereas in economic disasters, victims must have lost everything to be considered legitimate recipients of aid, in natural disasters victims must have only suffered minor losses.

Are there other cases in which the public supports relief giving regardless of need? If the character of the event determines the social response we would expect similar expectations for giving for victims of crime, war, epidemic disease, etc. If the nature of the population determines the response, however, we would expect support for giving to the middle and upper classes wherever they have incurred losses, be it due to natural or economic causes. We would expect to find, for instance, public support for aid to failing corporations, for compensation for losses due to seizure of corporate property by foreign governments, as well as compensation for corporate losses due to war and natural disaster.

It is the latter case that is perhaps the most interesting. It would not be surprising to find that relief is actually given on different bases to different classes of people, because that is the reality of an unequal distribution of power. The surprise would be if the public were supportive of such a system of relief giving. Evidence is that the public does expect "market" forces to produce inequality to some extent (Robinson and Bell, 1978). Rather than off-set these inequalities, then, relief giving would be expected to complement them. The findings presented here constitute some evidence that this is the case.

FOOTNOTES

1. A version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, Boston, August 24-27, 1979.
2. Relief giving is used here to refer to non-contributory programs for the transfer of resources. That is, social insurance programs, to which recipients have made direct contributions, are excluded from relief giving by this definition.
3. See guidelines for relief giving published by the American Red Cross, ARC 3045: "American Red Cross Disaster Services: Subject: Family Services--- Assistance to Families."

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THE DENYING OF DEATH: A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY*

Henry H. B. Chang
University of Maine at Presque Isle

and
Carla Kaye Chang

ABSTRACT

Cultural studies indicate the existence of a ubiquitous death fear. This fear is usually manifest through the defense mechanism of denial. In American society, the contradiction between life-oriented cultural themes and the death theme intensifies the denial of death.

Past studies indicate that a host of social and psychological variables are associated with death denial. The present study consisted of a survey of death attitudes. The results showed that death denial is associated with age, marital status, death of a parent, feeling of nervousness, and participation in dangerous activities. On the other hand, sex, health, and religious activity were not found associated with death denial.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of death permeates each and every strand of the unconscious fabric of society. The ubiquity of the concept reflects man's deep fear and anxiety, which, if uninterrupted, would destroy both individual identity and group solidarity. To deal with such a threat, a host of social and psychological mechanisms have emerged. Thus at the societal level we have religion, mythology and the death institution; at the individual level, death denial, death avoidance, and other defenses.

In American society, as a consequence of the contradiction between the life-oriented cultural ethos--activism, hedonism, conquest--and the death theme, death denial has intensified and emerged as the predominant mechanism to counter against death fear. In support of this assertion, Goer (1965) found that no major work of literature in the past twenty years portrayed any major characters as dying from natural death; and, Wolfstein (1950) discerned that death is not included in American films unless it is absolutely necessary to the plot.

Past studies indicate that a large number of social psychological