Interrogating Households in Anticipation of Disasters: The Feminization of Preparedness

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Cover Page Footnote

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It is now a maxim among scholars and policy-makers alike that disaster preparedness needs to involve community-based approaches in order to be effective. These include preparedness strategies in the household. But how do disaster preparedness policies and public discourses define "the household" in the first place? In this article, we explore how particular gendered notions of the household are reproduced in disaster preparedness policies and activities in Japan and the UK. Drawing on historical and cross-cultural analyses, we suggest that household preparedness efforts place the burden of labor on people coded as women—a phenomenon we call "the feminization of preparedness." Ultimately, we suggest that when disaster policies discuss "the household," even if they do not explicitly mention gender, there might be a problematic responsibilization of preparedness on women. Calls for the inclusion of marginalized people into disaster preparedness efforts should also be aware of the possibility of overburdening one group over others.

[Prepareadness, household, gender, feminization, Japan, UK]

What Covid-19 Revealed

In March 2020, soon after the Covid-19 pandemic led to a lockdown in the UK, Professor Laura Bear and a group of other anthropologists from the London School of Economics formed a research collective, the Covid and Care Research Group. Based on 6 months of ethnographic research, they produced the report, *A Right to Care: The Social Foundations of Recovery from Covid-19* (Bear et al. 2020). One of their key findings highlighted the limited and limiting definitions of the household underpinning government policies to combat the pandemic, such as restrictions on social interactions. Simply put, the UK government assumed that the physical boundaries of the house defined a household as a unit of care. For several months, the government only allowed two households to meet and imposed the "rule of six," according to which only six people from up to six households could meet. These lockdown policies did not take into account extended family networks that involve 3 or 4 government-defined households, or the fact that more than six people live in a single household, especially in ethnic minority communities (Bear et al. 2020, 23). In contrast, interviews showed that for many people, "the 'household' bounded by the physical house or flat was not the significant unit for social support or emotional connection" (Bear et al. 2020, 24). The government's definition of the household was disconnected from that of the diverse groups of people living in the UK.

The UK's early pandemic responses revealed the sociocultural assumptions about households underpinning emergency policies. Such assumptions were not particular to the UK, nor were they only about ethnically-inflected ideas. Lockdown and the closure of schools highlighted the burden that women shoulder when it comes to domestic unpaid labor (Barber, Brown, and Ferguson 2021, 7). Around the world, without the usual network of support that day care facilities, schools, children's extracurricular activities, and extended family members provide, the responsibilities of home-schooling and care work predominantly fell on women (Azcona, Bhatt, and Love 2020; Glabau 2021). The UN reported that women and girls in most countries took on more responsibilities such as family-based care of the elderly, childcare, and other unremunerated work "at home" during the pandemic (UN 2020). Thus, government policies in many societies compounded with wider public views on household responsibilities to reproduce gendered assumptions in pandemic responses.

Covid-19 brought into sharp relief a wider issue that we detect in disaster management. In this article, we explore how disaster preparedness policies and activities in Japan and the UK reproduce particular gendered notions of the household. Just as particular taken-for-granted ideas about households and families drove disaster response among government actors and ordinary citizens

in the pandemic, similar tendencies appear in disaster preparedness policies. The comparison between Japan and the UK across the 20th and 21st centuries allows us to trace how policy makers and experts have mobilized gendered assumptions of the household in the face of national emergencies in "Western" and "non-Western" societies alike. There are differences in historical and cultural contexts, but convergences clearly appear. We suggest that globally, people who are coded as women have often carried and continue to carry the burden of risk management in household preparedness because the work entails many activities that resemble domestic work.[1] As the pandemic revealed, "women" everywhere generally shoulder this work as unpaid labor. We call this phenomenon the "feminization of preparedness."

Just as disaster researchers have shown that women shoulder much of the responsibilities amidst and after a disaster (e.g. Enarson, Fothergill, and Peek 2018), we propose that this might be even more the case in everyday forms of preparedness—that is, efforts when the hazard is not yet visible and preparedness is conceptualized as part of daily life. When policies mention household or family preparedness, even if gender or women are not the focus, unspoken gendered assumptions exist which can overburden women. Ultimately, we argue that it is vital to first understand who constitutes a household, how households maintain themselves and care for each other, and, as this article highlights, who shoulders

particular types of labor in a given societal context. Otherwise, when the next big disaster strikes, we will repeat the same mistakes in overburdening one group of people over others in the efforts to survive.

We begin with an account of the ethnographic research that underpins this paper, including the authors' patchwork ethnography approach. We then discuss how "the household" is often a taken-for-granted category in messages about household or family preparedness and rarely concretely defined in terms of who constitutes a household, who is responsible for which tasks, and what difference that makes to the politics of preparedness. This is followed with a section on the gendered aspects of risk management, as disaster scholars have shown that women often shoulder the onus of preparedness in the immediate leadup to a hazard event and then of recovery, much of which is invisible labor. The rest of the paper traces a gendered analysis of the household throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, and how these ideologies are ingrained in preparedness policies in Japan and the UK. Although the focus of the paper is on gender, there are also classed and racialized assumptions about the household and the family at play. We will briefly touch on the importance of intersectional analyses of preparedness, which is a task for our future research, taking into account the specificity of the Japanese and British contexts. Ultimately, the article contends that whenever a policy or a Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) expert mentions

"household preparedness," we should be cognizant of the gendered assumptions of responsibility and burden of labor that might be implied between the lines.[2]

A Patchwork Ethnography

This article is based on observations that one of the authors (Watanabe) developed over the course of ethnographic research in Japan and Chile from 2016 to 2022. Anthropological research is traditionally assumed to require uninterrupted fieldwork for a year or longer, although few post-PhD scholars are able to achieve this given various university and personal commitments, as well as precarious employment for many. This is difficult even for PhD students nowadays (or perhaps was always the case), as many are in difficult situations with small stipends and little to no funding for fieldwork, or they juggle personal obligations and circumstances with doctoral research. Yet, most anthropological writing still tends to convey the research as if it happened in a continuous period of immersive fieldwork. Watanabe, with collaborators, proposed the idea of "patchwork ethnography" to capture this reality. They argue that ethnography is more often than not conducted in stops and starts, while balancing intersecting professional and personal responsibilities and situations (Günel, Varma, and Watanabe 2020). Several anthropologists have begun to highlight the fact that fieldwork is often

entangled with care work and other obligations that distract our attention in multiple directions (Kraemer 2021; Yates-Doerr 2020). Deep contextual knowledge, linguistic abilities, and trusting relationships with interlocutors, which characterize "traditional" conceptualizations of ethnographic research, are still important. Nevertheless, stitching together a couple of weeks or months of fieldwork at a time over many years can still yield legitimate knowledge. Conversely, just because a researcher stayed in the field for a year or longer does not mean that they were focused solely on research. Patchwork ethnography proposes that by acknowledging the fact that all ethnographic research is patchwork, we can expand current understandings of what constitutes knowledge and whose theorizations count as legitimate (Günel and Watanabe, forthcoming).

Patchwork ethnography is also about making visible in our writing the intersecting responsibilities that conditioned fieldwork. Watanabe conducted research juggling university teaching, administrative responsibilities, and personal commitments. Each trip to Japan and Chile lasted from two weeks to two months, and in total Watanabe has spent 7 months in Japan and 4 months in Chile so far (research is ongoing). The overarching research project has been about international cooperation around disaster preparedness between the two countries, but a large sub-theme is the use of playful methods in everyday forms of preparedness in Japan. In Japan, Watanabe conducted participant observation and

interviews at the government's Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), focusing on their disaster preparedness training modules for overseas experts. Furthermore, Watanabe has been conducting research at Plus Arts, a non-profit social design organization that delivers one of the most popular units in JICA's training programs. Plus Arts is known for its fun and playful disaster education games and events for children and their families. Communities and organizations across hundreds of locations in Japan and dozens in other countries, including Chile, have implemented their methods. Furthermore, Plus Arts staff provide consultancy to companies and municipalities, offering advice on how to develop products and programs related to disaster preparedness. Watanabe has volunteered at Plus Arts' office over the years to conduct participant observation of its everyday processes, from the preparation of events for children to brainstorming meetings for a client's product development. In addition, Watanabe has visited several disaster education museums in Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, and Kobe, other community-based disaster preparedness groups, and analyzed government reports and media stories related to disaster preparedness in Japan. Taken together, this part of the research has elucidated the centrality of household preparedness in Japan and how different actors promote it with varying consequences.

Between 2020 and 2022, the Covid-19 pandemic put a stop to Watanabe's field trips. In 2020, she also became the director of the undergraduate program in her

department. The pressures of the lockdown on university operations meant that her administrative workload increased exponentially. Research and writing were put on the back burner. During this time, Hanson graduated with a Master's degree in Social Anthropology from the University of Manchester in 2020. As she struggled to find the next opportunity amidst the pandemic, she approached her former MA supervisor, Watanabe, to see if the department had any research assistance opportunities. Watanabe hired Hanson to do some readings and literature reviews. This work expanded to a collaborative writing project and has continued even after Hanson secured employment, including a joint presentation at an online academic conference in September 2021. This article is the fruit of our labor together over these past few years. In this way, patchwork ethnography also entails engaging more openly with collaborative projects, as the heroic individual anthropologist venturing to an unknown world on their own is no longer the operative ideal (Hong 2021). Hence, knowledge production becomes a collaborative process that multiple people share.

In addition, this article is also patchwork in its attempt to show the possibilities of knowledge production based on cooperation between an academic and her former MA student in which the nature of this co-authorship extended beyond strictly academic collaboration. Furthermore, although the article has ethnography at its foundation, the analysis itself is not ethnographic. The arguments we make are

problematizations of trends we see in policy discourse and popular media. While

Watanabe's contribution derives from the fieldwork she conducted in Japan,

Hanson's insights arise from her online and archival research into UK policies

and historical studies around preparedness and pandemic responses. Even though

the analysis is not strictly ethnographic and we do not present findings about

women's actual levels of labor in household preparedness, we hope that the article

will set an agenda for future empirical research on gendered household

preparedness. Given Watanabe's more extensive research in Japan, the article is

skewed toward this analysis, yet the comparison made with the UK and on studies

of the US provides a fruitful insight into more general phenomena around the

gendered assumptions of household preparedness. For the purposes of this paper,

Watanabe's research in Chile has not been included.

Household Preparedness

Reducing disaster risks and preparing for the next hazard is not only a political

and infrastructural challenge; it is also a social one whereby households need to

prepare. In Japan, the emphasis on household preparedness is clear. Since 2018,

Watanabe has had a Google Alert set up so that online posts with the Japanese

word for disaster preparedness "*bōsai*" are sent to her as a daily digest. The

notifications about *bōsai* have pointed to a noticeable pattern: an emphasis on disaster preparedness as part of everyday life. For example, an article in Kobe Shimbun from January 16, 2022 features Professor Morinaga Hayao from the University of Hyogo on the topic of preparedness education in school curricula. Professor Morinaga states: "Preparedness education is not something special, but an extension of the everyday [*nichijō*]" (Hirohata 2022). Similarly, a Huffington Post article in Japanese from January 28, 2022 compares disaster preparedness "before" and "now" (it does not specify when this "before" points to), explaining that preparedness now is about having things that one can use or already uses in everyday life (Huffington Post 2022). Google Alerts for "disaster preparedness" and "disaster risk reduction" in English do not reveal a similar trend.

This digital tool has been a reliable research assistant for Watanabe in the long periods between fieldwork. In March 2023, it informed her of an article in the popular fashion and lifestyle magazine, *Orange Page*. The article advised readers on five ways that regular large plastic trash bags could be used for disasters: to put crunched up newspapers inside to transform it into a warm blanket; to use in place of buckets to carry water; to put water inside and place it into a toilet to prevent the reverse flow of wastewater during floods; to protect laptops from water and dust; and to use alongside a trash can, newspapers, and a plastic

shopping bag to create an emergency toilet (Orange Page 2023). These tips do not require anything other than what one might already have at home.

This idea is echoed in the disaster museum, the Tokyo Rinkai Disaster Prevention Park "experience center," which takes visitors on a simulation tour to learn what to do in the first 72 hours after a mass earthquake. One section contains 3-D displays on the walls, showing how one can turn everyday objects into emergency relief tools (Figure 1). For example, the large quantities of plastic bottles of water and other drinks that are delivered to evacuation centers could be turned into coffee tables or even chairs. The tagline reads: "Ordinary goods… save you" (*mijika na monoga… anata wo tasukeru*).

Figure 1: A display showing ways to use everyday objects as resources after a disaster (August 2019, photograph by Watanabe).

Other displays in this disaster museum communicate similar messages. One corner which showcased what evacuation centers looked like after the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami was entitled "How should we protect ourselves with the use of accessible items?" When Watanabe visited the museum in August 2019, there were two packs of plastic bags on the table: one labeled "adults" and another "children." Next to these were instructions for how a family could practice together cutting the shopping bags to make slings for injured people. There is a wealth of similar information online, in bookstores, at other

disaster museums, and in various workshops that give similar concrete advice on how to turn everyday items into resources for survival. This center, and other preparedness actors across Japan, communicate how preparedness is the responsibility of individual citizens and households, not simply the government and technocratic experts.

The focus on citizens, households, and communities as the core of preparedness activities derives from the lessons learnt after the 1995 Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake that devastated Kobe and surrounding areas. Widely circulating lessons from the earthquake state that 80 percent of survivors were helped by neighbors and family members, and not by professional emergency services such as fire fighters. The roads had collapsed and people had to rely on those immediately around them to survive. Subsequently, the Japanese government and disaster experts have touted the three-pronged principles of self-help (*jijo*), mutual help (*kyōjo*), and public help (*kōjo*), of which the first two are usually foregrounded. Here, it is notable that self-help does not necessarily mean individual action. The government White Paper on disaster preparedness clarifies that "self-help" includes families (*kazoku mo fukumu*) and that mutual help indicates support among people outside the family, such as neighbors (Cabinet Office (Japan) 2021, 60). This framework envisions communities as collectives of families or households, rather than individuals. Public help points to state-backed

rescue teams composed of, for example, firefighters and members of the Self

Defense Forces, which would only be able to arrive after a few days or even a

week when the next big earthquake strikes. The message that "ordinary goods will

save you" exists in this context of household preparedness as the core foundation

of DRR in Japan.

Household preparedness is also an important part of emergency and disaster

planning in other countries. The US government's Federal Emergency

Management Agency (FEMA) has a page "Make a Plan" that assumes the family

as the societal unit of preparedness (FEMA 2023). The UK government's

"Preparing for Emergencies" page includes the importance of households and

individuals to be prepared for various hazards and threats (Cabinet Office (UK)

2018). Furthermore, household preparedness to cope with blackouts is common in

Scandinavian countries (Heidenstrøm and Kvarnlöf 2018). Preparedness at the

household level is important in any society given the complexity of hazards and

risks that require multi-scalar approaches.

However, it is also imperative to step back and understand what "the household"

means in a given context (Shneiderman et al. 2023). Is it the same as "family"?

Does the household assume co-habitation? How do relations of familial care map

onto households? Who are the different members of a household, and what are

their presumed roles? Too often, policies assume that "household" or "family" is a naturally existing category with universal characteristics, overlooking questions such as these. Kai Erikson and Lori Peek (2022) have shown how US government agencies responding to Hurricane Katrina imposed a particular White middle-class concept of the nuclear family-household on largely African American extended families. This meant that provisions ranging from small temporary shelters to housing applications could not accommodate large family networks. This proved not only inadequate but life threatening to poor and non-White hurricane survivors. As Eric Klinenberg (2002) demonstrated over two decades ago for Chicagoans enduring a heatwave, people who do not conform to idealized and normative household structures, such as poor elderly people of ethnic minority backgrounds who live alone in neighborhoods with little public life, tend to be more vulnerable to disasters. Relevant to our article is the fact that, although much of the relief and recovery work rests on the shoulders of women, government agencies take a standardized approach to "heads of households," often male, as the recipients of aid (Erikson and Peek 2022, 101–3; see also Fothergill 2004). These studies show that taken-for-granted assumptions about households and families can have devastating consequences for those struggling in the wake of a disaster.

Gendered Risk Management

Disaster researchers have long pointed out that women are more vulnerable than men in disasters. Studies show that women account for more deaths and suffer greater economic insecurity than men after a catastrophe (Ashraf and Azad 2015; Neumayer and Plümper 2007). Given that disasters are the consequence of structural inequalities, poverty, and other vulnerabilities and that women around the world are more disadvantaged than men, observers note that disasters are gendered phenomena. Being the primary caregivers in families in most societal contexts places women at greater exposure to hazards, as they become the frontline of survival and recovery without decision-making power (Fothergill 1996). Women's marginalization also leads them to be less educated about disaster management, making them more vulnerable to hazards than men (Eriksen, Gill, and Head 2010; Petraroli and Baars 2022). Just as there has been a "feminization of poverty" (Pearce 1978), there seems to have been a "feminization of disasters," with more women bearing the brunt of the suffering.

DRR experts and institutions have taken this point on board. The inclusion of women in disaster response and DRR has gained pace in recent years. For example, there is now the UN Women's Resilience to Disasters Programme, the Women's International Network on Disaster Risk Reduction (WIN DRR), and the

Gender and Disasters Network (GDN). Scholars have shown the important role that women play in post-disaster efforts, from housework to ensuring a semblance of a return to "normal" life for the family, to community work mobilizing their ties with neighbors and children's schools and maximizing resources for everyone (Enarson 2001; Fothergill 2004; Kimbro 2021). Public discourse in the media and among disaster survivors themselves often frame these roles as women's "natural" propensities toward care and domestic work, reproducing traditional gender roles that perhaps seemed dormant in non-emergency times (Danielsson and Eriksson 2022; Hoffman 1998). Nevertheless, women also play a critical role in political action after a disaster (Moreno and Shaw 2018), building a community's resilience (Singh, Tabe, and Martin 2022), and contributing to improved livelihoods after a disaster (Clissold, Westoby, and McNamara 2020). Thus, a number of disaster management actors now recognize the important roles that women play in emergency contexts.

Nevertheless, this acknowledgment of women's contributions can reproduce inequitable practices. Post-disaster recovery efforts often address the "practical needs" of women, such as food and shelter, but this is "because it is they who assume responsibility for them [practical needs]… in the gendered division of labour" in the household (Bradshaw 2014, S63). Accordingly, women are expected to manage the recovery of their households and families without

necessarily having a say in wider decisions. Inclusion, then, becomes another form of double burden on women (Juran 2012). This is a phenomenon seen in the field of development aid. The geographer Sylvia Chant (2008) argued that it is not so much that women are the poorest (the feminization of poverty), but that there is a "feminisation of responsibility and obligation," as women are taking on more diversified forms of labor to economically support the household as well as continuing to shoulder unremunerated reproductive labor. Added to this are the various poverty alleviation programs that target women in their roles as mothers, wives, and carers of the community as they are seen to be more effective beneficiaries (see also Molyneux 2006). Microfinance is a good example of anti-poverty efforts that depend on women's gendered labor. Distinguishing the financial risks of microfinance from the perils of daily threats to life and wellbeing, the anthropologist Megan Moodie observed:

> It is this kind of cobbled together, jerry-rigged, good-as-long-as-it-lasts management of food, clothing, and shelter—those domestic necessities—that, I am arguing, makes coping with peril the condition of reproductive work in our time for poor women who are the intended beneficiaries of microfinance (Moodie 2015, 285).

The delivery of anti-poverty initiatives such as microfinance, therefore, depends on women's "traditional" gendered roles amidst precarious life conditions. While they might address poverty, women bear the brunt of these initiatives. As bearers of various kinds of labor to sustain the household and the family, as well as development programs, women shoulder the burden of risk management (or the management of peril, in Moodie's terminology) in an increasingly risky world.

Drawing on these studies of development programs, we propose that the feminization of responsibility happens in pre-disaster preparedness policies as well, and that much of this happens through the proxy category of "the household." This is because a large part of household preparedness depends on activities that resemble domestic labor. What makes this feminization of preparedness problematic is the immense amount of labor that it requires of women. An ethnographic vignette helps to illustrate this. In August 2017, Watanabe spent a few weeks researching and volunteering at the Plus Arts office. One day, the head of office, Yashiro-san, called together a couple of people to the meeting table in one corner of the office to discuss a project.[3] When we sat down around the table, he explained that the crisis management department (*kiki kanri kyoku*) of the city of Kobe had commissioned Plus Arts to develop material to promote to households the idea and practice of stockpiling emergency food for disasters (*bichiku*). One of the items in the brief was to create fridge magnets with

useful information on disaster preparedness. Yashiro-san and another young

colleague, Hayashi-san, were trying to come up with ideas for these magnets so

that people would want to keep them on their refrigerators, rather than throw them

away.

"What do you all tend to have on your fridges?" asked Yashiro-san as a way to

open the discussion. Everyone was quiet, so Watanabe offered that her mother

usually has recipes of foods that she makes often. "So maybe it should contain

information that is useful to see all the time, not something that you can

remember once you read it, like just an explanation of the 'rolling stockpile

method'.[4] For me, it would be useful to have information on how many things of

each item I should always have stocked." The others around the table did not

react, and Yashiro-san replied: "Well, it's really up to each person or family what

foods they store." Undeterred, Watanabe continued:

> My mother has a system where she has bottles of water under the
>
> sink for emergencies and labels them with numbers starting with 1,
>
> 2, 3, and so on, according to the expiration date. She makes sure she
>
> uses the bottles in that order in our everyday lives. I can't remember
>
> the details of her system, but information that helps people keep

track of expiration dates and how to cycle through the emergency

food and drinks might be helpful.

Yashiro-san picked up on this and suggested that maybe it would be helpful to explain how much water people should keep in storage. Assuming that each family member needs at least two liters of drinking water per day (the industry assumption in disaster management), a family of four would need 56 liters for one week. Since water is most commonly sold in two-liter bottles in Japan, this family would need to stockpile 28 bottles to survive one week.

Someone suggested that it would be helpful to show people how often they would need to restock their bottled water, based on how many people are in the household. Assuming that people should drink at least one bottle per week to rotate them, and that one box would contain six two-liter bottles in regular supermarkets, we began calculations for households of one person, two people, three people, four people, and so on, to a maximum of a six-person household. Since two people would need 14 bottles per week, that would mean buying two cases (12 bottles) plus two more bottles. But buying separate bottles would not make financial sense, so this household should buy three cases (18 bottles) for one week. That would mean four of these bottles could be for the following week, but two of them should be consumed before the end of the first week.
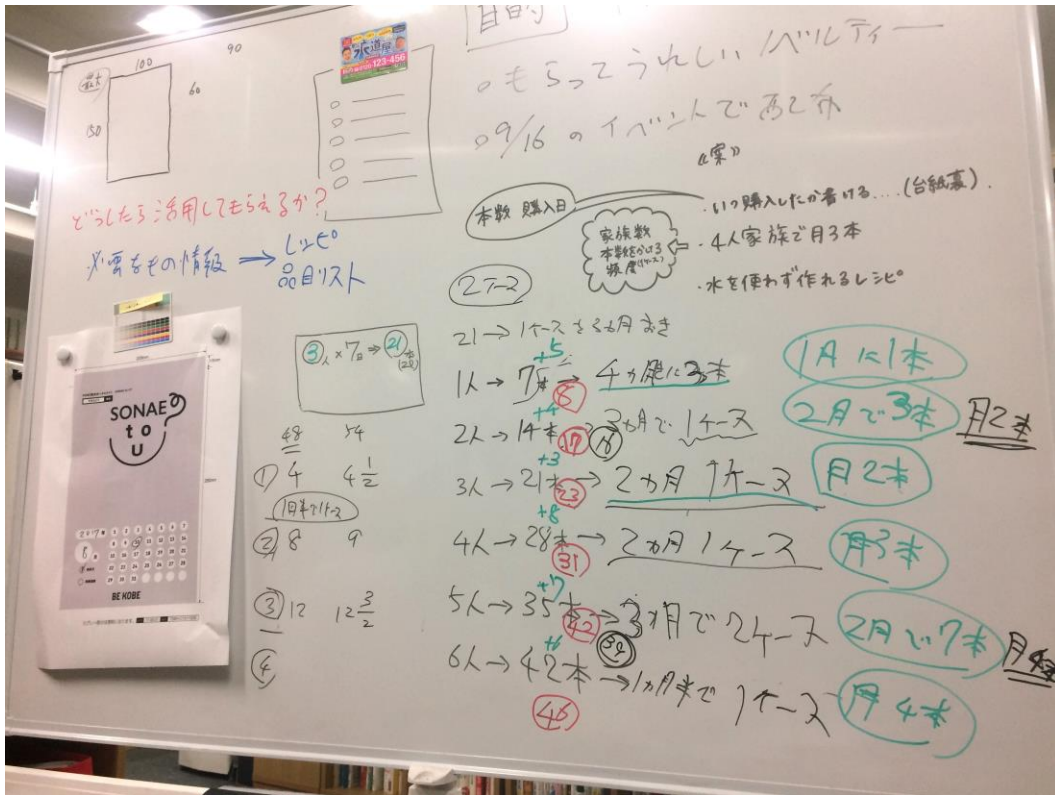
Figure 2: Plus Arts staff members calculating how many bottles of water a family should store and buy depending on the family size (August 2017, photograph by Watanabe).

Soon, Watanabe lost track of the calculations. But Hayashi-san and another staff member were helping with the calculations on the board, and Yashiro-san was completely in command of it all. He seemed excited about the idea and commented that having a "simplified chart" (*hayami hyō*) of how much water to have stockpiled would be really useful because, until this moment, he had never realized how complicated it was.

Researchers have already shown the head-spinning amount of work required in the immediate lead-up to a disaster, such as in the days preceding a flood or hurricane in the US, when women tend to take the threat more seriously than men and tackle the work of preparing the house, their children, and even the neighborhood to mitigate the disaster risks as much as possible (Fothergill 2004, 42–43; Kimbro 2021, 48–49). We propose that this housework-esque labor is even more pronounced in everyday forms of preparedness in which the disaster is not as imminent or cannot be seen in the horizon, such as earthquakes. These actions range from keeping the house clean and organized to stop objects and unhygienic materials from falling during an earthquake, buying emergency food and water and keeping track of these for family consumption, and maintaining neighborly relations to enable mutual support in the aftermath of a disaster. There is nothing inherently "feminine" about these tasks, and domestic labor is increasingly being shared across genders in many societies. Nevertheless, as the history of households and emergencies in the next section and the Covid-19 pandemic show, the mental and physical load of household maintenance in an emergency has fallen largely on women around the world, and still does today. As one of Watanabe's interlocutors, a woman in her 60s actively involved in community-based disaster education activities in Kobe, mentioned, there is something "housewife-like" (*shufuteki*) in making use of the everyday (*nichijō wo katsuyō*) in household preparedness efforts (personal communication, August 29,

2019). Although further empirical research is needed to substantiate if women, and especially housewives, do actually end up taking on a lot of the household preparedness work, our analysis here illuminates the gender ideologies that inform household preparedness policies.

The Cults of Domesticity and Productivity

The 20th century history of the household in the face of emergencies in the Anglophone world as well as Japan indicate that women have long borne the brunt of preparedness. One of the characteristics of preparedness policies in both the 20th century and today in Japan and the UK is that "the household" is conflated with "the family." This conflation has led to gendered conceptions of the household. In the UK, the Office of National Statistics (ONS) (2022) defines the "household" as "one person living alone, or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who share cooking facilities and share a living room, sitting room or dining area." In contrast, it defines the "family" as "a married, civil partnered or cohabiting couple with or without children, or a lone parent with at least one child, *who lives at the same address*" (emphasis added). The family is understood here as a subset of a household.

However, historically and globally, the two have not been the same. Anthropologists have long contended that the family is a kinship unit whereas the household is a unit of cohabitation, which does not necessarily include only kin (Yanagisako 1979). For instance, in some Southeast Asian societies on Java and among Malays, the primary societal unit was that of the household and "the kinship system was external to this unit" (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995, 22). In the UK, until the middle of the 19th century, the household was an enterprise of economic production and consumption to which all members contributed, and it was not necessarily equated with ideas of family (Folbre 1991, 471). However, with the arrival of industrial capitalism and wage labor, the household was separated from the means of production and the nuclear family gained prominence.[5] A division of labor between domestic and industrial functions emerged—the former undertaken largely by women (wives and mothers) and the latter by men (husbands and fathers). The predominance of wage labor also turned households into primarily spheres of "non-productive" labor, that is, of the family. Marxist feminists have argued that this "split of the labour process divorced production from consumption and interposed the commodity market between the two, so that the family and individual consumption necessarily occur in commodity form" (Seccombe 1974, 6–7). Housewives' housework became the process through which family-as-household consumption transformed into labor

power for the capitalist market, while keeping housewives' labor a moral virtue without economic value.

This demarcation of domestic labor as women's domain in the family and household appeared hand-in-hand with the "cult of domesticity." Connellan defines the cult of domesticity as a "belief in the process of homemaking and nurturing… Central to this is the mother figure who takes on the roles of childrearing and nurturing, homemaking, cooking, and cleaning" (2016, 1). While this ideology existed since the 19th century (Folbre 1991, 465), it played a particularly salient role in the protection of the nation-state in the 20th century. Pugh (2000) found that the number of magazines targeting women increased significantly after the First World War. These magazines propagated an ideology of domesticity and the notion of women as "home-makers" in their contribution to the war effort.

The household and the family have also shifted from being demarcated to becoming conflated in Japan. The household (*ie*) has traditionally been a corporate unit of production and labor, which includes consanguineal kin but not exclusively. The importance is the household as a unit of economic production, and accordingly, "that the constituent members are recognized as such by virtue of the functions they perform in contributing to the corporate status or goal"

(Lebra 1989, 188). Thus, what matters is not so much who the father is, but that someone fulfills that role for the *ie*. For that reason, the importance is in continuing the *ie* as a societal unit, even if that means using adoption to incorporate non-biologically related members. This happens even in households with a son if the outsider "is considered better qualified than a natural son as an heir" (ibid.). Thus, anthropologists have often argued that the *ie* does not quite fit classic systems of kinship.

However, similar to the UK, the household and the family in Japan have overlapped in recent decades. After the First World War, and especially in the wake of the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake that devastated Tokyo, the voluntary and domestic labor of women in the home became salient. Their contributions included building home shelters, promoting fire drills, and running neighborhood volunteer corps and evacuation exercises in schools (Koikari 2020, 6). This was in line with a wider trend in late 19th and 20th century Japan when the role and work of housewives became rationalized and mobilized to serve the development of the nation. As historian Koyama Shizuko (1991) has convincingly written, the 20th century brought about the concept of "home" (*katei*) in its nuclear, privatized, and feminized form, effectively making women, via the home, legible to the state as a site of intervention.

As the 20th century progressed in Japan, particular values attached to the

housewife were born: the virtues of thrift and proper management of household

finances, the diligent upkeep of the home to be tidy and clean, the attention to

healthy cooking, a strict but loving form of child-rearing and moral training, and

the maintenance of good relations with neighbors and relatives (Hendry 1993,

224; Ishii and Jarkey 2002, 42; Lock 1988, 46). These values tied the housewife's

duties with the wellbeing of the nation. The late 19th century saw these principles

enshrined in the Japanese state's motto of "Good Wife, Wise Mother" (*ryōsai*

kenbo), in which women were exhorted to contribute to the nation through their

frugality, efficient management of the household, and their care of the young, old,

and ill (Nolte and Hastings 1991, 152). This ideology persisted even after the

Second World War. The "standard" Japanese household became the nuclear

family composed of a husband working in an office (the "salaryman"), a

housewife, and two children—an idealized middle-class family-household that

still holds power in Japan today (Goldstein-Gidoni 2017; Ochiai 1996). But the

housewife as rational, resourceful, and industrious is a continuation of earlier

ideologies. State agencies encouraged housewives to save money for their

households, which contributed to the high rates of national savings that helped

develop modern industries in Japan (Ishii and Jarkey 2002, 43). In this sense, the

role of housewives has not been passive or "weak" in modern Japan, but rather

central to the economic and cultural advancement of the country. Some scholars

have even argued that "a cult of productivity" defines the Japanese housewife, which is different from the Euro-American "cult of domesticity" (Nolte and Hastings 1991, 173). Others have shown how the role of the housewife created various opportunities for public action for women in Japan (LeBlanc 1999).

Whether it is a cult of domesticity or a cult of productivity, the modern tendency to equate the household to family has designated domestic labor inside the home as "women's work." Note that this is not a "natural" progression of societies. The notion that "women belong in the home" (and men work outside) might have existed in Japan since the 18th century (Imai 1994, 48–49). But ideas of the housewife (*shufu*) as responsible for the household finances, cooking, and child-rearing arrived to Japan with Euro-American influences in the early 20th century (Imai 1994, 60). No longer a corporate unit of economic production, the household (*ie*) became divided into public and private domains, with men working in the former sphere and women responsible for the latter. Tracing the European history of this development as discussed above indicates that capitalist wage labor produced this categorization. In short, wherever capitalism dominates as the economic system, we are likely to see a gendered understanding of the household.

The Home as Civil Defense

The Cold War defined much of the world in the second half of the 20th century. In the US and the UK, "home-making" became part of what it meant to be prepared, as a family, for potential nuclear war. Historian Laura McEnaney (2000) illustrates how Cold War civil defense in the US relied on and reproduced a particular concept of the family in the 1950s. She shows how this privatization of national security constructed an image of the family with a breadwinning father, a homemaker-wife, and two or three children—an image of a middle-class and White suburban family at the center of civil defense plans. For example, government experts promoted the construction of nuclear shelters in the family home, using the imagery of a dependable male head of household at the helm, a smiling homemaker wife and mother responsible for maintaining the stockpiles in the shelter, and diligent children who help their parents build the shelters and practice emergency drills. Many of the messages targeted women, specifically the housewife as someone who should keep the house tidy and clean to avoid the risk of fires and the accumulation of potential radioactive particles (McEnaney 2000, 74). Perhaps counterintuitively for a national security strategy, "home protection made preparedness immediately a 'woman's concern', for the skills and services required to prepare for and survive an attack were virtually the same as a housewife's domestic chores and community service" (McEnaney 2000, 89). If

capitalism had spurred the gendered division of labor in the household in earlier

centuries, the securitization of the household during the Cold War solidified it,

equating protecting the household-family with protecting the nation.

The sociologist John Preston has made similar arguments for the UK. He writes

that while national defense in the UK prior to the Second World War depended on

the nation-state as the unit of action and survival, from the 1950s onwards, the

responsibility fell on individuals and families (Preston 2012, 1). Although the

UK's version of civil defense was less systematic than the US version and was not

actually implemented due to resistance from civic groups and competing

government departments (Preston 2015), the rhetoric carried a similar emphasis

on the household as synonymous with a racially White, middle-class nuclear

family (Preston 2012, 36). In 1980, the government issued the Protect and Survive

pamphlet, which focused on the message to "stay at home" during a nuclear

attack, giving tips on how to secure a house against radiation fallout. Much of the

advice, such as stockpiling food and keeping essential daily items in the fallout

shelter, assumed a particular image of a middle-class family with a wife and

mother who would do most of these preparations. Moreover, the house itself was

represented in specifically middle-class ways, as safety was only guaranteed in a

multi-story house, and not in flats (hence not in a block of public housing council

flats), bungalows (hence not for many elderly residents), or caravans (hence not

for those of low income or marginalized Gypsy Roma and Irish Traveler communities) (Home Office 1980, 9). Cultivating preparedness in the face of a potential nuclear attack depended on learning methods that suited a specifically gendered, classed, and racialized household.

In contrast to the US and the UK, scholars and practitioners in Japan do not tend to discuss the history of disaster preparedness in relation to civil defense in the Cold War, yet there *are* pre-1945 transnational connections. Sheldon Garon (2016) argues that, in the interwar years, Germany, Britain, and Japan learned from each other the importance of civil defense, believing that during an air raid in another war, professional firefighters would not be enough to extinguish the fires. However, such parallel developments around household-based civil defense did not appear after the war. Reasons for this divergence are unknown, but we speculate that the demilitarization of Japan under the US Occupation (1945–1952), and the national focus on postwar recovery and economic development might have eclipsed bottom-up approaches such as household-level disaster preparedness. In 1961, the Basic Act on Disaster Management (*saigai taisaku kihon hō*) was enacted, which defined the responsibilities of different societal actors in disaster preparedness and response, but the focus was on governmental actors. According to this law, municipalities would play a central role to protect and save its residents, with guidance and support from prefectural and national

government authorities. The roles of citizens and community groups were left vague and only minimally addressed in the law. The state's disaster response and preparedness during this time prioritized state-led infrastructural measures, such as building seawalls against tsunamis. "Soft" approaches, such as the role of households, were overlooked. This, of course, changed with the 1995 Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake.

Household Preparedness in the 21st Century

The Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake brought about a newfound realization in Japan that infrastructures can fail and neighborhood- and household-level action is needed in times of mass disasters. Subsequently, a focus on household preparedness came to prevail, as discussed above. Koikari (2020) has shown how communication around household preparedness in Japan is highly gendered, targeting women to take on these responsibilities. There are popular how-to books, for example, that show housewives how to make use of traditional items, such as washcloths (*tenugui*) for multiple purposes during an emergency (Koikari 2020, 55). Other publications and websites instruct mothers in daily methods to keep a home tidy and secure, especially for small children. Echoing the message

in the US during the Cold War, the emphasis on women's domestic chores links "domestic orderliness and disaster readiness in which a well-arranged home purportedly presents a solution to the problem" (Koikari 2020, 49). After all, if furniture is properly secured to the walls and dishes, toys, and other everyday items are always stored away neatly in locked cabinets, it will be safer during an earthquake. The fact that these recommendations are aimed at women is what is notable here. Koikari uncovers what she calls "a new cult of domesticity, in which women are the chief agents of protection and homes are a main site of defense" (Koikari 2020, 44). Household preparedness, therefore, becomes a vehicle for revitalizing ideologies of women's domestic labor.

General disaster preparedness policies and government guidelines are not explicitly gendered; they do not overtly state that women should shop for and manage stockpiled food items, for example. Nevertheless, the word "household" becomes a proxy for women's labor in the context of Japan today. The Japan Cabinet Office's Gender Equality Bureau admits that one of the challenges in disaster preparedness and response is that there is still a prevalent assumption that "men work, women are at home" (*dansei wa shigoto, josei wa katei*) (Cabinet Office (Japan) 2020, 2; see also Petraroli and Baars 2022). Consequently, when preparedness methods relate to the home, the unspoken assumption is that it is the women's domain. Conversely, when preparedness relates to women, the tendency

is to focus on concerns of the home. For instance, the report on women's

participation in disaster preparedness plans by the Gender Equality Bureau of the

Cabinet Office (2020) foregrounds issues of pregnancy, childcare, and eldercare,

even while it also lists problems such as gender-based violence and women's

participation in decision-making processes. The underlying assumption is that

women are the primary caretakers of children and the elderly, and are therefore

bound to be home during the daytime, be responsible for its protection in the

advent of a disaster, and continue to care for vulnerable family members in

evacuation centers (e.g. Cabinet Office (Japan) 2020, 25, 28, 42). Household

preparedness efforts tend to rely on, and thereby reproduce, existing gendered

assumptions about households.

Interestingly, the UK has taken a slightly different path in recent years. The "war

on terror" after 9/11 created a dispersed and intangible sense of threat in contrast

to earlier wars (Cornish 2007). This diffuse sense of threat shaped British policies

on preparedness in new ways, focusing primarily on individuals and an

amorphous reference to "communities." The category of the household that was

central during the Cold War disappeared. For example, the UK government's

2004 Preparing for Emergencies campaign included a leaflet that was distributed

to every household, in which the slogan "go in, stay in, tune in" became central

(Cabinet Office (UK) 2004). Although "staying in" implies the household, or at

least the house, the pamphlet appears to communicate to the individual "what *you* can do" (14, emphasis in original)—from learning First Aid to calling the Police Anti-Terrorism Hotline if one spots something suspicious. More recently, the Counter Terrorism Preparedness Network published a report in which the role of the community alongside the individual is highlighted. Its authors state that "having communities that are resilient and able to withstand the shocks of terrorism will increase ability to deter, detect, respond and recover when terrorists strike" (Moffett and Coombe 2019, 6). The report categorizes the roles of the public, private, and third sectors, but the scale of the household is absent.

Nevertheless, in the 2013 iteration of Preparing for Emergencies, the household returned. Although the policy itself does not mention the household, a quick browse of its linked contents shows its prominence. One of the tips in preparing for floods includes the use of an emergency plan to discuss with family and friends. The advice comes with a hyperlink to a template from the "Household Emergency Plan" of the West Sussex County Council. In addition to a suggested list of items to have in a "grab bag," the template plan contains a section where members of a household can input relevant information in response to the following questions:

- If you are evacuated, is there somewhere we can go? Friends or family?

- If you can't contact each other, where should you meet / or who should you leave a message with?

- Who will be responsible for picking up the children from school? (if applicable.) (West Sussex County Council n.d.)

Survival depends on working together among people living together and securing the house against threats. This framing is still the working policy of the UK government as of 2023. More research is needed to ascertain to what extent this household preparedness in the UK context reproduces gendered assumptions.

Centering the household in preparedness policies and efforts is not inherently wrong; it is the gendered assumption behind it that we problematize. The context of the Covid-19 pandemic with which we opened this article indicates that women still predominantly undertake housework, especially in times of emergency. Everyday forms of preparedness for disasters that might or might not happen, such as earthquakes and hazards exacerbated by climate change, resemble housework-esque labor even more than work in the midst of emergencies. A lot of this preparedness work is labor-intensive, and if nothing else, requires mental labor. If assumptions behind the idea of the household are not examined, there is the danger that women will shoulder a triple burden consisting of work outside the home, domestic work, and household preparedness.

Beyond Gender

Professors of architecture and urban planning, Alex Bitterman and Daniel Baldwin Hess (2020), propose that US responses to pandemics like Covid-19 should revive the Cold War-era mobilization of citizen participation in emergency preparedness. If so, the government and the public will need to ensure that the gendered expectations that underpinned these civil defense efforts are not reproduced. While researched have pointed out how women have been burdened with care and recovery work in post-disaster scenarios and during the pandemic, this will not be solved with more policies targeting households if gendered assumptions are not interrogated. Our article urges a consideration of what any of us mean when we speak of the household or the family in disaster preparedness and response efforts. The focus on households is important, as studies of post-disaster recovery in households show that daily routines, which are often overlooked in policies, are central to people's sense of recovery (Sou et al. 2021). Nevertheless, caution is needed. Just as Chant (2008) shed light on the feminization of responsibility and obligation in development, we point to the feminization of preparedness whereby "the household" is a proxy for women taking on the heavy responsibilities of risk management in the household-as-family without necessarily holding decision-making powers.

The assumptions underlying the idea of the household go beyond gender. The scholarship on gendered labor in post-disaster recovery stresses that it is not only gender that determines vulnerability but also its intersections with class and race (Enarson, Fothergill, and Peek 2018). This was also the case in the Cold War-era civil defense discussed above. Studying a community that was flooded, Alice Fothergill (2004) states that "social and economic class were significant factors—perhaps even more significant than gender—in the process of receiving disaster assistance and resources" (78). Rachel Kimbro (2021) makes a similar observation about families that battled Hurricane Harvey in Houston, Texas. She found that the affluent mothers whom she researched did shoulder more responsibilities than their male partners, but their socio-economic status and social capital allowed them to access resources that others without those means could not, easing their survival and recovery. At the same time, some studies show that gender might not be the only relevant factor in emergencies: intersectional analyses indicate that in some contexts, it is the relationship between class and gender that make a difference in how households prepare for crises (Shah et al. 2023). Therefore, although we narrowed our discussion to gender in this article for the purpose of focus and comparability between the UK and Japan, we recognize that it cannot be separated from other structural factors. In both countries, the household in preparedness policies is not only gendered but also classed (as middle-class) and racialized (as White and ethnically Japanese,

respectively). Nevertheless, we suggest that while the classed and racialized assumptions are exclusionary, the unique challenge of the gendered element of household-based policies is that it makes preparedness inclusive but burdensome on women.

Disassembling assumptions in the feminization of preparedness is also particularly pressing today, when increasing numbers of households do not conform to orthodox definitions. There are non-heteronormative families, some of them not new in non-Western societies, which demand ways of thinking about disasters that go beyond the gender binary (Gaillard et al. 2017; Rushton et al. 2019). In addition, many families span several households for their daily caring responsibilities, as became evident among ethnic minorities in the UK during the Covid-19 lockdowns, and there are increasingly single-person households in Japan and many other parts of the world. Preparedness policies and efforts need to adapt to these changing patterns of sociality and households so that they are inclusive. Nevertheless, regardless of the gender ideology at play, inclusion should not be at the expense of burdening one member with more workload than others. A good place to start is to unpack the assumptions about the household in existing preparedness interventions.

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NOTES

[1] We acknowledge the problematic use of the term "woman" that entrenches gender binaries and biological determinism, ignoring the diverse possibilities of the concept. There is, indeed, a long anthropological tradition challenging the "Western" and heteronormative gender binary (Collier and Yanagisako 1987; Moore 2002). As Rushton et al. (2019) and others highlight, there is a need for disaster scholars and practitioners to consider gender fluidity and diversity. However, our focus in this article is the orthodox and, indeed, binary ways that disaster policies and media communication in Japan and the UK understand "the household." We return to the importance of doing disaster research beyond the gender binary toward the end.

[2] The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction defines DRR as "aimed at preventing new and reducing existing disaster risk and managing residual risk, all of which contribute to strengthening resilience and therefore to the achievement of sustainable development" (UNDRR N.d.)

[3] All names are pseudonyms unless otherwise stated.

[4] The "rolling stockpile method" is a formula for stockpiling emergency food so that one incorporates it in their everyday eating habits. It is a solution to the problem of expiration dates. Once consumed, the emergency food can be bought again to maintain a constant supply at home that is eaten before it expires. In this way, when a disaster strikes, food on the table will be in date and similar to the food one has been eating before the disaster, ensuring both enough quantities of emergency food and a blurring of the distinction between disaster and "normal" times (Cabinet Office (Japan) 2013).

[5] Note that this historicization of the nuclear family is debated. Peter Laslett (1970) argued that the nuclear family was predominant even before industrialization. In contrast, Sylvia Yanagisako (1979) critiques his analysis based on quantitative data, which conflates co-residence in census reports with family structure.