

Make Hay While the Sun Shines: How Community Organizations Help Refugees in Preparation for Disasters

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Abstract

This article examines community organizations' perspectives and practices regarding [preparing refugees for disasters](#). Adopting the theoretical framework of structural and cognitive [social capital](#), this study conducted in-depth interviews with leaders, staff members, and volunteers from refugee serving organizations. It finds that community organizations have taken a vital role in generating new social capital for refugee communities through education and training, resource mobilization, planning, and coordination.

Theoretical Framework

Social Vulnerability and Refugee Communities

- ❖ Disaster preparedness requires collaborative efforts of service providers and the refugee communities themselves to reduce vulnerability and minimize potential damages (Keeney 2004).

Community Resilience and Social Capital

- ❖ Social capital might help refugees identify and overcome the barriers during the disaster cycle through increasing community resilience (Eisenman et al. 2009).
- ❖ Social capital refers to "the resources available to individuals and groups through membership in social networks" (Villalonga-Olives and Kawachi 2015, p. 62).
- ❖ Types of social capital:
 - ❖ Structural
 - ❖ Cognitive

Methods

- ❖ Sixteen in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with leaders, staff members, and volunteers from the local community organizations in the state of Texas.

Research Questions and Results

❖ RQ1. How do service providers help refugees gain structural social capital?

- ❖ Service providers utilized their organizational resources to connect refugees with a wide variety of resources where they could obtain information, service, and support. To some extent, service providers served as a bridge to connect refugees to the broader society. While the connections between refugees and service providers created some structural social capital, service providers introduced refugees to more external sources, creating more structural social capital.

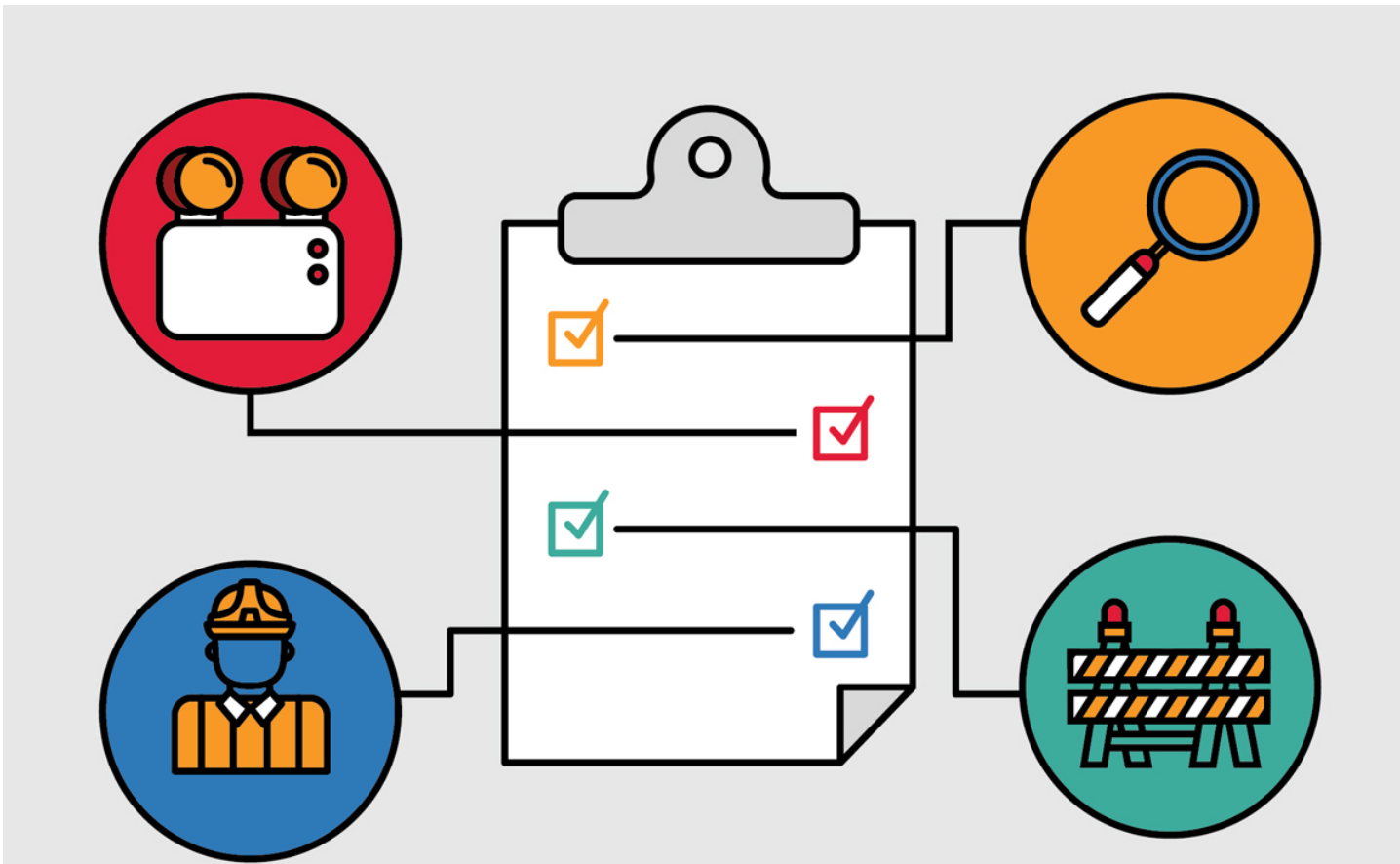
❖ RQ2. How do service providers help refugees gain cognitive social capital through offering (a) informational support, (b) instrumental support, and (c) emotional support?

- ❖ Service providers utilized their organizational resources to connect refugees with a wide variety of resources where they could obtain information, service, and support. To some extent, service providers served as a bridge to connect refugees to the "broader society." While the connections between refugees and service providers created some structural social capital, service providers introduced refugees to more external sources, creating more structural social capital. This kind of "two-step" process was a major method to produce structural social capital.

- ❖ "Knowing"
- ❖ "Doing"
- ❖ "Feeling"

❖ RQ3. What are the barriers that prohibit them from achieving the above goals?

- ❖ External resources
- ❖ Barriers



Discussion and Conclusion

❖ The Role of Community Organizations: Beyond "Giving"

- ❖ Service providers' interactions with refugees suggests that social capital development is in essence relationship of exchange (Pelling and High 2005).

❖ Combating the Barriers

- ❖ Although refugee communities may have certain vulnerabilities such as limited resources and other forms of hardship, these organizations have recognized refugees' adaptive capacity in dealing with trauma and hardship (Marlowe 2015).
- ❖ Being laid back in encouraging refugees to adapt themselves to American culture might impede refugees from obtaining enough relational social capital from groups outside of the refugee serving organization.