

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

OLDER ADULTS' EXPERIENCES OF A FLOOD
DISASTER: MAKING SENSE OF AN
EXTRAORDINARY EVENT

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Psychology
at Massey University, Palmerston North,
New Zealand.

Robyn Jean Tuohy

2009

Abstract

Disasters occur within the routines of everyday life and have a disruptive and destructive impact on human lives. To understand how older individuals make sense of a disaster, nine older adults in Kaitaia, New Zealand were interviewed about their experience of a flood they experienced in July 2007. These interviews were conducted with four residents living in a rest home and five pensioners living independently who were evacuated from their homes. The two groups differed in the levels of support and assistance received before, during, and after the disaster. The rest home residents experienced little disruption and did not require relocation; the pensioners experienced major disruption and relocation.

Thematic analysis was used to describe how these older adults' accounted for their experiences of the flood. The narratives were influenced by the participants' identity as either dependent rest home residents or pensioners living independently in the community. The analysis revealed that their accounts of the disaster were incorporated and integrated into the personal and social context of each person's life story. Narrative themes that emerged from the analysis for the pensioner group were: coping with limited assistance, the importance of treasured possessions, and social support and community. The pensioner themes reflected their vulnerability to a disaster and the challenges they faced during the post disaster recovery phase. Themes for the rest home residents were ageing and dependency, and the importance of protection, care, and trust. These themes reflected the dependent world of the rest home residents and the security of being cared for.

Acknowledgements

This study was a collaborative research project between the School of Psychology and the Disaster Research Centre. I would like to thank Dr Christine Stephens who provided support, guidance and advice at all stages of my thesis. I would also like to thank Dr David Johnston for introducing me to the field of disaster research and the support he has given me over the duration of this thesis.

My thanks also go to the participants of this study for their willingness to take part and the time they gave me to talk about their experiences of the flood. Without their input this research would not have been possible. I would like to thank the welfare organisations that supported me in the research by handing out information about the study to participants. I would also like to thank the professionals who provided support to those participants who requested someone to be with them during the interview.

Finally, my special thanks to my wonderful family. The love and unfailing support of my husband, Pat, provided me with the freedom to complete my degree. Simon, Seb, Oliver, and Emma have remained constantly interested in the research that their mother has been doing. My love and thanks to you all.

Table of contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of contents	iv
CHAPTER 1.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
<i>Research question</i>	8
CHAPTER 2	9
METHODOLOGY	9
CHAPTER 3	12
METHOD	12
<i>Participants</i>	12
<i>Ethical issues</i>	13
<i>Enrolment of participants</i>	14
<i>Interview process</i>	15
<i>Analysis</i>	16
CHAPTER 4	18
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	18
BIOGRAPHICAL INTEGRATION	18
<i>Introduction</i>	18
<i>Pensioner Narratives</i>	21
<i>Rest Home Narratives</i>	40
<i>Summary</i>	52
THE FLOOD IN THE CONTEXT OF AGEING: PERSONAL AND SOCIAL VULNERABILITY.....	54
<i>Introduction</i>	54
<i>Pensioner narratives</i>	56

Coping with limited assistance	56
Loss of treasured possessions	62
<i>Rest home residents' narratives</i>	66
Ageing and dependency	66
Care and protection.....	69
Trust.....	71
<i>Social support and community</i>	72
Rest home residents' social support.....	73
Pensioners' social support.....	75
<i>Summary</i>	81
CONCLUSION.....	83
<i>Implications for practice and research</i>	85
REFERENCES.....	88
APPENDICES	94
APPENDIX 1A INFORMATION LETTER TO PENSIONERS	94
APPENDIX 1B INFORMATION LETTER TO REST HOME RESIDENTS.....	97
APPENDIX 2 INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE REPLY FORM	100
APPENDIX 3 PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM.....	101
APPENDIX 4 LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS WITH SUMMARY OF RESULTS.....	102
APPENDIX 5 INTERVIEW GUIDELINES	104
APPENDIX 6.....	105
PHOTOGRAPH OF STOP-BANK AND LOCATION OF PENSIONER FLATS	105

Chapter 1

Introduction

Disasters are more than just physical events; they occur within the routines of everyday life and have a disruptive and destructive impact on human lives. It is important to understand that how an individual makes sense of a disaster is both a unique personal process and a social process, which is mediated by wider social and demographic conditions. Furthermore, it is relevant to situate human experiences of disasters within the context of existing social conditions, in order to recognise the influence that the socio-cultural environment has on individuals and communities. Rodriguez, Quarantelli, and Dynes, (2006) state, “the best way to understand disaster effects is to know what the community was like prior to the disaster event” (p. xviii). Prominent social researchers such as E.L. Quarantelli and Russell Dynes have conceptualised disasters not as an events with place or time characteristics but as social phenomena, which reflect both personal and social vulnerability within the realm of the social system itself (Perry, 2006). This is because in a rapidly unfolding emergency event, peoples’ responses often are influenced by existing social conditions and individual vulnerability (Sorensen, & Sorensen, 2006). Both personal and social vulnerability to disasters will be discussed in order to gain an understanding of how such phenomena affect human lives. In this thesis, a disaster is conceptualised as a social phenomenon because it is the existing social conditions of individuals and communities that will affect how well people come through a disaster in terms of physical and psychological wellbeing. It is necessary to understand both micro and macro influences affecting health and well-being outcomes in a disaster because certain population groups are at higher risk of being adversely affected in such an event.

A demographic group more likely to be at greater risk in disasters and therefore more vulnerable in a disaster are older adults (Cutter, Boruff, & Shirley, 2003; Bolin, & Klenow, 1988; Perry, & Lindell, 1997). This population group experience more negative impacts resulting from a disaster because they are vulnerable by the nature of their age and, importantly the influence of social conditions prior to the disaster. Older adults are at higher risk of experiencing negative impacts in a disaster because age related physical and cognitive decline create personal vulnerability before, during and

after a disaster. However, it is also important to recognise individual agency and life long competencies that older adults will call on to cope during a disaster. Ferraro (2003) conducted a longitudinal study on 37 older adults (non-representative sample) who had experienced the 1997 Red River flood. The psychological functioning measures assessed were self-rated health, number of medications taken, Geriatric Depression Scales (GDS-SF) and the Wechsler intelligence scale (WAIS-R). His results supported the view that post-disaster performance was influenced by pre-disaster performance and that older adults are resilient to some of the negative effects resulting from a disaster. Phifer and Norris (1989) also found that pre-flood depression was the greatest predictor of post-flood depression. These findings suggest that post-disaster outcomes for older adults reflect their pre-disaster strengths and weaknesses. Age is an important variable in assessing preparedness and recovery from a disaster with regards to physical and cognitive strengths and weaknesses. However, preparedness and response to a disaster needs to extend beyond simply considering age as a risk factor. This is because disasters reveal existing social conditions that may put older adults in a more vulnerable position in a disaster. Bourque, Siegel, Kano, & Wood (2006) state that age has consistently been reported to have an association with morbidity and mortality resulting from a disaster, as older adults were more likely to be hospitalized and more likely to be killed. Studies of Hurricane Katrina, which devastated New Orleans in 2005 demonstrated disproportionately poorer outcomes for older adults compared to other population groups (Fussell, 2006). In order to ascertain variables that influence older adults' vulnerability in a disaster, inquiry must extend beyond using age as a predictor variable for adverse outcomes in a disaster. Socio-cultural factors, which differentially put people at risk of loss, need to be considered. This means that there is a need to understand what the existing socio-cultural conditions are, so that age is not the only way of attributing and categorizing why this population group becomes more vulnerable during a disaster. Bolin (2006) argues that vulnerability should not be seen as an attribute that belongs at the individual level, but encompasses wider social processes that predispose certain population groups to be more vulnerable than others.

Three factors relating to increased social vulnerability in this older age group that will be discussed are: social connectedness, social inequalities and socio-cultural influences. First, social connectedness is related to the available social networks an individual has to call on for assistance when faced with a highly stressful situation like a disaster.

Older adults are at higher risk of being more socially isolated than some other population groups because of their reduced social networks. This is because factors such as age and illness can have an impact on decreasing social relationships and social connectedness. Social networks can also become diminished due to deaths of friends, family and other social support people. As people age into their seventies and eighties there are fewer people to rely on in times of need (Tyler, 2006). The reduction of social connectedness for older adults places this population group at an increased risk of not receiving information regarding possible disaster preparation (Riad, Norris, & Ruback, 1999). Lack of information from others can also influence individual decision-making in a disaster. This is because assessment, evaluation and problem-solving help to appraise the situation may not be available. Reduced social networks among this age group can also be reflected in the decreased ability to access and receive evacuation assistance. At the same time, neighbours or professionals outside an individual's close support network may not be utilised due to reticence about making demands on others (Tyler 2006). Research by Kaniasty and Norris (1995) found that the smaller the social support system a person had, the less practical support was available in terms of transport and accommodation during a disaster. Riad et al. (1999) state that the greater one's social links are to the community the more likely one is to receive informational support that clarifies the severity of the event in advance. Social connectedness has an important influence on the ability to be informed, anticipate, prepare for, respond and recover from a disaster event, which contributes to influencing how vulnerable this population group becomes.

Poor social connectedness also relates to one's space and place (location) within the community, which can have a negative affect in a disaster. Social space relates to the social relationships and the social practices where physical and imaginative activities occur (Wiles, Allen, Palmer, Hayman, Keeling, & Kerse, 2009). Social spaces create meaning and identity within "webs of relationships and integrated places" in this way spaces and places have a complex influence on human experience (Wiles et al. 2009, p. 666). For example, residents in a rest home are a community of vulnerable people who by nature of space and place are identifiable as personally and socially vulnerable by the wider community. Their age related dependency means they are more likely to receive and expect the services of emergency personnel. They are also in a social environment whereby assistance in a disaster is recognised as necessary because of their age-related

vulnerability. Space and place become part of the social conditions that exist before, during, and after a disaster, and have an influence on individual and social vulnerability. Mayhorn (2005) states that disasters are time and space situated, which together interact with the hazard and community level social factors, and ultimately make particular population groups more vulnerable in a disaster.

In the context of older adults living independently in the community, identifying and providing them with relevant information and assistance prior to a disaster may be compromised if their social connectedness within the community is reduced. Older adults in the community living independently, may not be easily identified as needing assistance during a disaster, because they are not a visible group as a rest home population is. Their social situation and location may also influence their perceptions about needing help and expecting to receive help. Research by Tanida (1996) found that elderly people, who experienced the great Hanshin earthquake, suffered more fatalities, experienced more psychopathology than other victims, and tended not to express their needs directly. They were also one of the last groups left behind in temporary accommodation after the disaster. In 1995, the Chicago heat wave posed a hazard, but it was not a disaster until social factors such as reduced economic resources and social isolation of older adults interacted with the hazard event. This age group's fatalities were disproportionately greater than the rest of the population (Klinenberg, 2002). The influence of place and space of older adults was a significant negative factor influencing vulnerability to a disaster in research conducted by Tamura, Hayashi, & Kimura (2006). The authors gathered questionnaire data on the flood responses from elderly residents to examine what factors contributed to the twelve deaths resulting from the Niigata flood in 2004. Those interviewed were unaware an evacuation warning had been issued about two hours earlier, so were unprepared for the rapidly rising floodwater. It was assumed that residents of their community association would manage to self evacuate based on the fact that the elderly lived by themselves. However, some of those who died needed assistance with walking. The Niigata flood research highlights that the residents in the study were less informed and less prepared to cope with the hazard they faced, than was anticipated by the community. Lack of information, assistance, and a short warning time meant that they were more vulnerable to not successfully making preparations to leave the flood area. Both place of residence

and social space influenced meanings around identity, independence and self-care and how this group was perceived.

The second factor that has an influence on vulnerability in older adults is social inequality, particularly, lower socio-economic status. Reduced financial security has an influence on the practical and material resources able to be accessed, which can affect older adults' ability to optimally respond to a disaster. For example, lack of access to transport, communication technologies, and alternative accommodation away from the disaster area can negatively impact on disaster outcomes. The geographic location of where older adults live can also influence the level of risk to a disaster and their recovery afterwards. Place inequalities that relate to urbanization and economic vitality have an impact on predisposing certain communities, including older adults, to becoming vulnerable (Cutter, Boruff, & Shirley, 2003). For example flood prone land is likely to be utilized by more marginalized sections of the community because of the cheaper land values and cheaper housing stock. Inequalities are also reflected in post disaster recovery; Bolin and Klenow (1988) conducted a comparative study of black and white victims of a tornado, and found that older black adults were slower in their post disaster economic recovery. The authors suggest this was due to their more vulnerable economic situation. The risk of loss from disasters can create an uneven vulnerability distribution across individuals, households, communities and regions (Bankoff, Frerks, & Hilhorst, 2003). Social inequality in a disaster is also reflected in specific population groups. Women and migrant groups are vulnerable groups in a disaster, which reflects the social divisions already existing in society (Enarson, Fothergill, & Peek, 2006). Older adults are represented in both vulnerable population groups (women and migrants), which further contributes to older adults being at greater risk of suffering negative outcomes in a disaster.

The third factor that has an influence on vulnerability in a disaster is the influence of socio-cultural factors, which include norms, attitudes and beliefs within society. Historically, human societies have always had risks and hazards to deal with, and such events are part of the human experience (Quarantelli, 2006). If we are to understand how disasters are made sense of at this point in time, a socio-cultural perspective on risks and hazards is essential. Lupton (2006) states that it is relevant to look at the way that risk operates in terms of how we think about ourselves others and our wider social

institutions. Being 'at risk' can be understood as a way to categorise people, and risk status is attributed to quantifying factors such as age, which relates to disaster outcomes. In a disaster situation, risk and vulnerability are both constructs that serve to describe and identify population groups. Lupton (2006) argues that managing risk at this time in history has become an individual endeavour, one of self-responsibility. Similarly, Furedi (2007) states that the psychological state of individual vulnerability has come to be understood as an intrinsic attribute belonging to the person. The understanding that both risk and vulnerability are now characteristics associated with individual responsibility has implications for how vulnerability in a disaster is understood. Rather than becoming vulnerable through the effects of social factors, individual vulnerability has now been consigned to certain social groups, which include the elderly, women, children, minorities, the disabled and the poor (Furedi 2007). In this sense "vulnerability as a state of being encourages the normalization of a heightened sense of loss towards disasters" (Furedi 2007, p.488). Socially created vulnerabilities such as decreased social networks, social inequalities and socio-cultural influences become less visible. Individual characteristics, such as age, are now used as attributes to identify groups that have adverse outcomes. Individual vulnerability serves to mask the wider social issues, which encompass "political, economic and spatial processes of marginalization that not only produce or intensify poverty, but also, in given circumstances, constrain certain portions of a given population (often by class ... or ethnicity) to occupy hazardous areas" (Bolin, 2006, p.123). Mayhorn (2005) argues that social factors need to be incorporated in understanding why older adults experience more negative impacts. It is not sufficient just to look at older adults and assess their cognitive abilities in relation to understanding hazards and warnings. Social vulnerability therefore relates to the pre-event circumstances, which include the inherent qualities within social systems that create the potential for harm in a disaster (Lindsay, 2009). It is at the social site that vulnerability exists for some groups, rather at the level of individual responsibility and decision making per se. Exploring social factors associated with older adults' vulnerability to disasters is relevant at this point in time because of the demographic profile, which will see more living longer into old age.

Identifying those older adults, who are more likely to be vulnerable to the effect of disasters before, during, and after the event, is salient because of the increasing older adult population and increasing prevalence of natural disasters. In New Zealand the

projected population of those over 65 years will increase 2.8 fold from 510,000 in the 2006 census to 1.44 million in 2061 and this group will be living longer (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). The increasing ageing demographic in the western world means a greater proportion of those over 65 years will experience disaster situations, which will occur with greater frequency than in the past (Cutter, & Emrich, 2005). Although many older adults will be cared for in a rest home environment, a greater proportion will be self reliant and living independently in the community. The current New Zealand policy of 'positive ageing' (also adopted in other western countries) is intended to encourage older adults to remain active and independent in the community (Ministry of Health, 2002).

Positive ageing is a new social concept that has developed around defining what it is to age in the later years of life. It is forward looking in terms of challenging ageing stereotypes around dependency, and cognitive and physical decline, but it is not without its critics (Katz & Marshall, 2003; Holstein & Minkler, 2003). Featherstone and Hepworth (1991) are also critical of the term positive ageing, and state that the popular media now reflect the concept of 'ageless' ageing. This concept emphasises independence and self-reliance and masks the ageing process as it relates to decline and dependency. The popular construction of positive ageing may be problematic for older adults, because of the social changes that are currently occurring, which are impacting on the traditional ways of coping. The reliance on families, marriage and male-female roles to be as available as in the past to help in times of need, are now failing, and instead individuals must be reliant on themselves (Lupton, 2006). There is no longer the certainty of traditional expectations or social structures with regards to family relationships and social networks for older adults. As a result older adults may be more vulnerable in a disaster because of the expectations associated with independence and self-reliance and loss of traditional supports. The promotion of individualisation (a characteristic of late modernity) means there is now a freedom to choose as traditional norms and values weaken within western societies. At the same time however, there is a dependency on existing social conditions, which does not affect all population groups in the same way. Older adults are likely to be more vulnerable to these social changes and be more dependent on existing conditions than other population groups. They may not have access to financial or material resources, nor have traditional sources of support such as extended family to call on in times of need, such as a disaster. Lupton

(2006) adds, “life becomes less certain even while it is placed more under one’s control” (p. 71). In the context of a disaster, individualisation has created new ‘individual’ vulnerabilities for older adults, particularly reduced social connectedness. The traditional social structures of family and neighbourhood supports may not be a readily available resource to call on in a disaster. Furthermore, the emphasis on independence in the community, while beneficial, may also adversely affect older adults by creating isolation and social vulnerability.

In order to assess disaster preparedness and improve outcomes of older adults, the relationship between personal characteristics of older adults and levels of social connectedness, inequalities and socio-cultural influences must be evaluated. In a disaster situation these three social influences significantly affect the ability of older adults to prepare, respond and recover from such a hazard event. A disaster will amplify such social influences, and as a result older adults are more likely to suffer poorer outcomes during disasters. Understanding older adults’ experiences of a flood is relevant to informing strategies that address disaster mitigation. The Kaitaia flood disaster that occurred in 2007 provided an opportunity to increase our knowledge about how best to support older adults in disaster situations.

Research question

My research question is: “What were the experiences of older adults who were evacuated during the Kaitaia flood in 2007?”

This thesis will address the research question by exploring the experiences of a group of older adults to understand how they made sense of the flood disaster. I chose narrative interviewing as my methodology so that the stories of older adults’ experiences and the meanings they attributed to the flood disaster could be explored. The use of narrative as a qualitative methodology extends the disaster research literature to further understand the circumstances that influence personal and social vulnerability.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Narrative as a research method is able to examine possible relationships between physical needs, psychological and emotional support, social networks, economic resources, and life experience using participants' own evaluations. Using narrative to contextualise how older adults made sense of, and coped with a disaster, can elicit rich details about meanings and experiences. In this sense, narratives are a way of communicating to others about events and experiences that have happened. Narrative as a methodology is able to explore "how individuals perceive, organize, give meaning to, and express their understandings of themselves, their experiences and their worlds", (Mishler, 1986, p. ix). The rich detail expressed in narrative enables personal, social, cultural practices to be connected together to provide a more complete view of social life. In a research context narrative interviews are speech events, which are constructed jointly by interviewers and respondents (Mishler, 1986). Both the listener and the teller work towards creating meanings they both can understand. Telling stories is one of the "natural cognitive and linguistic forms through which individuals attempt to order, organize, and express meaning" and are contextually grounded (Mishler, 1986, p.106). Narrative research is not a matter of coding respondents' answers "as if they had been produced by an isolated speaker responding to a stimulus question" (Mishler, 1986, p.58). Narrative does not decontextualise the event from the context of the situated nature of events and experiences (Mishler, 1986). An absence of context, such as occurs in standard research interviews, can lead to the historical and social influences being unacknowledged and meanings distorted.

A characteristic of narrative is that events and action within the story can be ordered and interpreted. To this end, narratives are contingent, and there is always a linking of events or ideas (Riessman, 2008). The story element of narrative encompasses a whole, and within the internal composition there is beginning, middle and end. Polkinghorne (1988) states "experience is the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful" (p. 11). He argues it is from narrative knowledge gained through people's stories of their experiences that we are able to understand the human world. Narrative becomes the cognitive scheme through which events and actions are made

available for direct observation as expressed in the stories we tell about ourselves (Polkinghorne, 1988). In this way, the narrative process enables the person to make sense of and give meaning to events and actions occurring with change, so that there is a sense of order from the disorder associated with change (Murray, 2000).

One of the strengths of narrative is that it produces the opportunity to be sensitive to the respondent in exploring understandings and meanings generated from the interviewer's questions. Narrative data therefore becomes a co-construction between the interviewer and the respondent to develop and arrive at shared meanings and understandings (Mishler, 1986). It is important to recognise the influence of the researcher within the social context of narrative interaction. This is because both the narrator of the story and the listener of the story are both integral to constructing how the story event is delivered. Mishler (1986) argues that in the standard interview structure, the inherent hierarchical nature separates relations between events and experiences, so that a personal coherency within the interview is obscured in favour of the methodology. Narrative seeks to reduce such alienation by reducing the asymmetrical nature of the interviewer and the interviewee. The collaborative nature of co-construction means that the interviewee has greater control over the structuring of meaning. The interviewer does not arrive with a list of predetermined or standardised questions, because searching for ways of asking questions arises from within the interactional conversation. Likewise this searching creates a similar environment for the respondent in their search for understanding; silences are left silent while the respondent develops their story in their own way without interruption from the interviewer. Narrative interviewing in this way can be seen as a reflexive and dynamic way of exploring and understanding meanings and experiences.

Narratives can be analysed at the individual level, but can also provide representations of experiences and meanings that extend to the socio-cultural level. Riessman (2008) states narratives are interpretive and mirror the world; they may be conscious and deliberate by the teller, or they may be obscure for the teller. In this sense, narrative analysis in the research context can be used as a way in which a conversation or story can be interpreted to reveal truths about human experience. Similarly, Bruner (1991) states that narrative can be understood as a cultural tool, reflecting where the individual story meshes with the wider cultural processes that influence all our stories. Narrative

can contribute to our understanding of events and actions within the social world, because stories are situated and contextualized in time and space. Phibbs (2008) states that within the stories we tell are expressions of how we make sense of our world, which can provide a coherent ontology about self and our relationship to the world. By situating individual narratives within the wider cultural context they can inform about how we understand and make sense of our world. However, accumulated meanings within our culture do not remain static because new contributions are added and deleted (Polkinghorne, 1988). We both act upon the world and are acted upon so that narratives are continually being shaped. This is relevant to the context of my narrative research because disaster research about older adults' experiences of disasters is limited, and new contributions are needed. Research from the mid twentieth century may not be as culturally and ecologically valid when applied to the current aged cohort of the early twenty first century. There is a need to study disaster preparedness, response and recovery in the context of recent disasters. It is important to gather further knowledge from this cohort, so that mitigation of disaster effects is responsive to the needs of older adults at this time. The use of narrative analysis will provide both an individual and socio-cultural perspective on older adults' experiences of a disaster.

Chapter 3

Method

In February 2008, I travelled up to Kaitaia with two other natural hazard researchers who were interested in how the township of Kaitaia, New Zealand had coped with a civil defence emergency and evacuation, which had occurred in July 2007. There were two different research perspectives within the group. One perspective was to assess the effectiveness of emergency management planning. The other was my health psychology perspective, which was to explore the feasibility of doing research about the experiences of a population of older adults who were evacuated from a rest home. It was not until we had meetings with emergency planners from the Northland region that I became aware that there was an independent community population of older adults who had also been evacuated from their homes. Furthermore, this group (7 months post-flood) was just beginning to be re-established back into in their pensioner flat accommodation.

Participants

The participants were a location specific sample of nine older adults from Kaitaia, who were evacuated from their accommodation because of rising floodwaters. Four participants lived in a rest home and five lived independently in the community in a grouping of semi-detached pensioner flats. The two groups differed in their levels of independence, and their access to support. The recruitment of two groups in the study permits comparative analysis between different communities each with a similar age demographic: a rest home environment which provides 24 hour support and care, and an independent pensioner environment where support and care is primarily the responsibility of the individual. All participants from the rest home and pensioner flats met the criteria of being physically and cognitively able to be interviewed about their flood evacuation experiences.

The small town local networking of Kaitaia enabled me to contact the support worker involved with the pensioners' welfare assistance. The support had been ongoing from the time they were evacuated to the welfare centre after their homes were flooded in

July 2007. I consulted with the organisation, which was responsible for welfare support of the pensioners via email, to gain organisational permission for the support worker to provide me with the liaison link to the pensioners. Organisational approval was gained from the regional manager of this organisation who was supportive of my research project. The regional manager suggested that the most appropriate liaison support would be from the local Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), which had been working closely with the pensioners in the aftermath of the disaster. I contacted the NGO worker who then distributed the 'Information letter to pensioners' (Appendix 1A) outlining my research to potential pensioner participants. Until I received the 'Invitation to participate' (Appendix 2) reply form back from the pensioner participants, they remained anonymous to me. The 'Information letter to pensioners' (Appendix 1A) included an assurance that the level and quality of their government welfare support, either now or in the future would not be affected by their participation or non-participation in the project.

I visited the rest home manager and discussed my research project focus: to hear the residents' stories about the day of the flood, the night of the evacuation and their return to the rest home. Organisational approval was gained from the general manager of the rest home. She consented to be the liaison person and agreed to distribute the 'Information letter to rest home residents' (Appendix 1B) to the residents whom she assessed as being physically and cognitively able to be interviewed. Organisational anonymity could not be guaranteed to the rest home, as Kaitaia is a small town with a population of around 5,000. Until I received the 'Invitation to participate' (Appendix 2) reply form back from the rest home residents, they remained anonymous to me.

Ethical issues

As my research was focused on soliciting information about the flood, I submitted details of my research proposal to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) for ethical consideration. I was aware that asking the participants to recall the memories of the flood may cause distress, and was also aware that some participants may still be finding the post impact readjustment distressing. I addressed the potential for distress and the possible need for support during or after the interview by stating in my 'Information letter to participants' (Appendix 1A), that a participant was welcome

to have a support person of their choice present at the interview. For the pensioners, a support worker from a NGO who had been assisting the pensioners in the months after the flood was also suggested as another alternative. For the rest home participants a possible support person from the rest home was also suggested (Appendix 1B). Given the dependent environment at the rest home, the staff were aware of the times I would be doing the interviews and who the participants were, which contributed to creating a supportive environment for residents participating in the study. No rest home residents requested a support person and none of the participants during the interview showed signs that recalling the flood event was distressing. Two of the pensioners had a support person with them. One of the pensioners, who had his home help caregiver with him, experienced emotional distress when he recalled being at the welfare evacuation centre and the following morning being taken back by his care person to her home to stay for five days. The audio recording was paused while his home help caregiver and I provided support. With his permission, when he was ready, I then restarted the audio recording and he shared his experiences of the flood event with no further distress.

The participants interviewed were given pseudonyms to protect their identity and any personal information that could compromise their anonymity was removed. All participants had the opportunity to edit their transcriptions and make changes if they desired. A freepost stamped addressed envelope was supplied should transcripts need to be returned. None of the participants returned their transcripts, and the interview content from each participant remains unchanged.

Enrolment of participants

The Information letters (Appendices 1A and 1B) included a description of the purpose of the study and invited the rest home residents and the residents of the pensioner flats to participate in the research project. Included with the relevant Information letter on a separate sheet, was the 'Invitation to participate' reply form (Appendix 2) for each person to complete should they agree to participate in the study. If the rest home residents and the pensioner flat residents chose to participate, they would then reply to me using the Invitation to Participate reply form. A freepost envelope addressed to me at the School of Psychology, Massey University, was enclosed.

Once I received the 'Invitation to participate' reply form back from the rest home residents, I rang each person to arrange suitable times and dates for conducting the interview. I also asked whether they would like to have a support person/people present at the interview or available afterwards. I also emailed the rest home manager informing her of the dates that I would be at the rest home doing the interviews.

In the same way, once I received the 'Invitation to participate' reply form back from the pensioner flat residents, I contacted each person by phone to arrange a suitable time and date for conducting the interview. I also asked whether they would like to have a support person present at the interview or available afterwards. Two pensioners arranged for a support person to be with them during the interview. One participant used their home help caregiver and one used the NGO social support worker.

Interview process

After I received the reply letters back and had telephoned the participants to schedule interview times, I travelled to Kaitaia and spent 4 days conducting the interviews. Before starting the interview with each participant, I went through the information sheet and the details of the study with each person, and clarified any questions or details about the study that the participants had. I also made clear that if questions arose at any time during or after the interview, I would be happy to answer them. I checked that each of the participants was aware that the interview would be audio recorded, and that a digital CD copy of the interview (and a transcript if required) would be sent to each participant if they wanted such copies. Each participant was then invited to sign the 'Participant consent form' to confirm that they were comfortable with participating in the study (Appendix 3).

Eight participants gave consent for their interview to be audiotaped and I transcribed the audiotapes myself. Each participant was aware that they could ask for the recording to be stopped at any time. One rest home participant chose not to have the interview recorded, but consented to me making notes during the interview.

The rest home residents were interviewed in their own private bedroom at the rest home. The pensioners were interviewed in their own home.

Each interview was semi-structured in order to allow each person to tell their story and recount their experiences of the flood (Appendix 5, Interview guidelines). The intention was to ask open-ended general questions that would elicit extended answers. The storying of the event from a theoretical perspective was intended to encourage the participants to share their meanings and experiences that temporally linked events or ideas into a meaningful whole. The form of the interview was to use each participant's narrative as the data for analysis. I sought to be sensitive and reflexive to each person's flood experiences without using a standardized set of questions. My research questions were oriented towards achieving a focus on the flood event while at the same time my questions sought to enable wider meanings of these experiences to be expressed. The time duration of the nine interviews ranged from 55 minutes to 35 minutes.

These procedures were approved by MUHEC.

Analysis

I transcribed each of the audio-recorded interviews and analysed the transcribed data using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for analysing, reporting and interpreting themes within data (Braun et al. 2006). This method of analysis focuses on what the content of the narrative communicates rather than how it is structured (Riessman, 2008). A key feature of this approach is that the story is kept "intact by theorizing from the case rather than from component themes across cases" (Riessman, 2008, p. 53). The story is not coded as thematic segments, rather the themes are kept within the story to "preserve sequence and the wealth of detail contained in long sequences" (Riessman, 2008, p. 74). Thematic analysis also attends to time and place by locating narratives in a specific context that informs interpretation and analysis of the data. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis is a flexible method that enables participants to become collaborators in the research process. The use of thematic analysis for this research project provided an interpretive and coherent way to convey each flood story. Thematic analysis of the flood narratives was based upon a realist ontology whereby meaning, experience and language were assumed to have a unidirectional relationship (Braun et al. 2006). There is a reaching out and a seeking to relate the event with human experience. Stories that we tell are not just about "cognitive attempts to order the world but stories that are shaped by the social context within which they are expressed" (Murray, 2000, p. 340).

The interpersonal nature of narrative as a collaborative production between the teller and the listener has been acknowledged within my analysis. Mishler (1986) argues that the narrative is a joint production between the teller and the listener which enables individuals to perceive, organise, give meaning to, and express understandings of themselves, their experiences, and their worlds. The influence that the interviewer has on how the respondent's story is told is important to acknowledge. As much as possible, I have explicitly put my voice in the speech excerpts that have been used as examples, so my collaborative voice in each participant's story is visible. I have used ellipses "... " to indicate where the respondent's speech has been discontinued, and inserted square brackets "[]" where clarification within an excerpt is needed, or where I have joined in with the participant's story. For the most part the excerpts used in this thesis are uninterrupted speech episodes and have not been cut and pasted together. My goal was to facilitate the expression of narrative and to create an environment where the respondent and I were engaged in story construction to arrive at shared understandings and meanings about the flood disaster. Narrative does not provide direct access to experience rather the stories are representational of experience, and it is through the stories we exchange that "we interpret the actions of others and ourselves" (Murray, 2004, p. 95). Murray (2000, 2004) argues that narrative can take account of how stories are related to personal and socio-cultural levels of analysis. We draw on cultural plot lines to construct our stories about the world and to define ourselves (Murray, 2004). My analysis of the narrative data sought to be reflexive to both the personal and socio-cultural context of the narratives.

During the transcribing stage of the interviews, I began to get an understanding of the content and sense of each narrative. After each transcription had been checked with the audio recording for accuracy, I read each interview several times to immerse myself in the data. All the material that would represent each person's story was underlined. Identified themes, which had an important relationship to my research question, were marked in the margin and were then used to structure my results and discussion section. The coding of the themes was an inductive approach; I was not trying to fit the data into a preconceived framework, rather, the coding of the themes was data driven. Both personal and broader socio-cultural narratives were expressed in the Kaitaia narratives. The rich data generated from the nine individual case studies was able to highlight similarities and differences between the participants' stories about the flood.

Chapter 4

Results and discussion

In sharing their experiences of the flood, I hoped older adults would find their involvement in the research a positive experience at a personal level. In my Information letters (Appendix 1A, 1B), I informed each participant that their research participation was a valuable contribution to disaster research knowledge, and would help to increase the knowledge base used to improve outcomes for older adults who experience disasters. Hearing the stories and contextualizing older adults' experiences of the flood was also a way to highlight a wider social awareness of how older adults coped with the flood as well as the effects that the flood had on them. My research method provided a voice for these older adults to tell their stories from their perspective, which served to empower a demographic group whose voices are more often silent in a disaster, but whose negative outcomes are more often highlighted afterwards.

A major theme common to all participants was named 'Biographical integration'. This theme related to personal identity, and was expressed within the stories each person told.

Biographical integration

Introduction

The central focus of this thesis emerged when I made telephone contact with the first of the rest home participants to arrange an interview time. In the course of discussing a suitable time with the first resident, she spontaneously said, "of course I've experienced the 1958 flood that happened in Kaitaia". This woman had linked the 1958 and 2007 floods into her biography despite the separation of 49 years. Sadly she passed away before I was able to interview her, but our short conversation provided me with a sense that the experience of a disaster was not a separate event from the lived self. The disaster had become a reference point to other challenging or disruptive experiences in a way that created continuity, coherence and order over time.

A theoretical understanding of disruption comes from Giddens (1979), who studied circumstances where everyday environments had become disrupted and routines dislocated. He theorized that the consequences of such disruptive experiences or 'critical situations' created the situation where a departure from the taken-for-granted everyday life rhythms and daily experiences occurred. The unpredictability and disruption to peoples' lives became a threat to their ontological security. This implies that the "taken-for-granted" reality of a person's life is no longer as certain or understood in the context of the disruption, as the disruption to personal and social routines creates tensions and challenges. The construct of disruption was later theorized by Bury (1982) using Giddens' (1979) concept of 'critical situation' to provide an analytic focus in the context of patients' experiences of being diagnosed with a chronic illness. Bury (1982) argued that the 'taken-for-granted' understandings about one's health in relationship to the future were disrupted. The disruption to one's life because of chronic illness can provide a conceptual way of understanding how biography is changed. Bury (1982) contends that "a fundamental re-thinking of the person's biography and self-concept is involved" (p. 169). There is the sense that with the rethinking of one's self-identity, there is a departure from the daily rhythms of life because the future is changed or put on hold. Such departures or disruptions from the taken-for-granted can create challenges to identity and self for each person. Faircloth, Boylstein, Rittman, Young, and Gubrium (2004) have taken a more critical view of Bury's concept of biographical disruption. They argue there is an ongoing biographical construction that is linked to the meanings of illness and its relationship to daily life. Importantly, individuals are active and agentic in constructing themselves after an illness, so that the illness is incorporated "as part of an ongoing way of life" (p. 256). Faircloth et al. (2004) propose that rather than a biographical disruption there is a biographical flow. If knowledge of meanings within the individual's personal and social context is understood, then biographical flow can be conceptualised as a way to understand how a disruptive event is made sense of. Central to their argument is that sudden illness can be understood as a disruptive event which can be conceptualized as part of one's self, that there is a "biographical construction of the lived self" (Faircloth et al. 2004, p.242). This concept can provide a wider understanding of how a disruptive event becomes framed as something that "happens while one's life continues to flow onward" (Faircloth et al. 2004, p.258).

Just as illness has been conceptualised as a disruptive event that occurs within the ordinary context of individuals' personal and social lives, so too does a disaster event. Disasters create situations where everyday routines become uncertain and dislocated. In the context of ill health, Bury (1982) theorised that one's biography was disrupted and revised. The narratives I gathered did not fit with this concept of disruption. However, biographical disruption is a relevant construct in which to understand how the continued absence of daily familiar routines and ongoing uncertainty may affect one's self-identity after a disaster. Biographical disruption therefore could be relevant as a theoretical framework to use in disaster research. A more adaptive view of coping with disruption was proposed by Faircloth et al. (2004), who theorised that disruptions to routine expectations were made sense of in an ongoing biographical flow. The Kaitaia flood narratives link to the concept of biographical flow, as participants actively integrated the personal and social disruptions they experienced into their stories. I have extended the theorising on biography and disruptive life events by using the term 'biographical integration' to provide a thematic framework for the narratives I gathered from the Kaitaia flood victims. Each older adult talked about the flood by drawing on past and present experiences to provide a sense of personal and social continuity. Talking about the flood was also a way of expressing agency, identity and continuity of self. The disruption was not experienced as an interruption to their biography, rather, the disaster was storied to express biographical experiences, challenges and importantly, construct self-identity. The disaster did not stand alone as a natural hazard disaster, but was part of each person's life story. The participants' personal stories were also reflections of broader cultural narratives. Phibbs (2004) states, "social relationships and cultural practices are embedded in the stories through which people constitute their identities" (p.51). In this way, biographical integration also encompassed the existing social conditions to reflect broader social processes.

For the older adults in my study, the flood was disruptive because their homes were threatened with a flood and they all were evacuated on the night of the disaster. However, for the five pensioners living independently in the community, this disruption was longer term than the rest home residents. The pensioners' flats were flooded under one metre of water, and they were relocated to different parts of the Kaitaia township. They were away from the familiar networks of their established pensioner flat community for a period of about six months after the flood. The rest home residents did

not experience flooding nor re-location as the rest home had a slightly higher ground elevation. The residents were able to return home the next day from their overnight stay at either the welfare centre or hospital depending on the level of care that was required.

Pensioner Narratives

Mrs B

Mrs B had been living in her flat about 6 years before the 2007 flood occurred. Her decision to live in the pensioner flats was:

“Because it’s just nice and convenient, I don’t have to worry about doing the lawns, they [the council] do them for me, and it’s independent, it’s good”.

Mrs B’s story focuses on her sense of individual responsibility and self-affirmation in being able to maintain her own independence. For her the flood was experienced as confirmation of her ability to successfully remain independent with minimal assistance from others. I asked Mrs B if she had considered the possibility that the prolonged days of rain may cause a flood. Mrs B expressed the importance of her ability to be independent, and recounted previous life events relating to independence to answer my question:

“Well it doesn’t surprise me, like I am quite aware of floods, but I don’t panic, that’s all, and I mean, you know, wait until it happens, so once I had talked to the guys [the firemen giving the warning to evacuate] like what I do is check with someone that knows first, rather than you know, just because he [ex-husband] rang up [to warn Mrs B], doesn’t mean that I was going to leave, and I went out, if there was a flood due to happen there would be services out here, because the first thing they [emergency services] do is head for the people here that can’t look after themselves, and they can help them to get out or whatever. But I am quite independent, so that’s OK. So I can afford to just see what happens and just take myself away. Some people have chosen not to come back they

just don't like the idea that it flooded. But I've seen Kaitaia under heaps more water than that, so to me it was a baby flood, like it's upset some people but not me, long as I was insured and with me being on my own for so many years. I used to be hoarder, but when you've spent time on your own and you know, moved in other ways, like I formed a new relationship for a few years, and you're virtually starting again. So when you come back here [referring to returning to her pensioner flat after the flood], you are starting again as well”.

I asked what she meant by ‘starting again’ in the context of accumulating possessions:

“I started off with nothing and I just bought everything second hand, and then as the years went on I just replaced it ... I had a brand new bed, brand new furniture, brand new lounge suite.”

Mrs B felt that the novelty of having all her furniture and possessions replaced after the flood was not as exciting as her friends imagined it to be:

“If I had had the stuff twenty or thirty years, it would have been wonderful, but I virtually just replaced with what I had, I mean what I had was what I wanted”.

Material improvement after the loss of her possessions in the flood was also an expression of her continued self-efficacy and a demonstration of her independence and adaptability. Mrs B was able to make her current situation better in terms of upgrading and tailoring household possessions lost in the flood:

“I was able to adapt after the flood ... and so what I did, I just added and improved at the time when I was replacing through insurance. They [insurance company] would cover things for a certain amount of course, replaceable, and if I wanted, like with the big TV, well I thought I am getting older, now's the time to get one a bit bigger you know, a bit easier to see as your eyes get tired”.

Mrs B was also able to improve her wall insulation, she recalled how in the year prior to the flood she had asked the owners of her flat to insulate a very cold wall, which was still to be completed at the time of the flood. Afterwards she reminded the owners about the need for insulation which they subsequently did. Mrs B sums up by saying:

“I’ve adapted, I’ve made things better, not just because I could get things new, but I have improved and made it as comfortable as I can”.

Adapting after the flood also was a demonstration of coping:

“I was able to deal with it [the flood], whereas a lot of people feel they can’t, you know, they are frightened or they are not covered by insurance”.

A longstanding characteristic of Mrs B that she identified was her ability to make good out of bad. Mrs B gave examples of previous situations and challenges where she was able to demonstrate being capable. In the context of the 2007 flood Mrs B saw the flood as another challenge:

“I’ve always been capable ... I make sure that I do it well ... I’ve done all sorts of things, like crocheting and knitting on machines at home and all kinds of jobs really”.

I respond by beginning to ask the question ‘so this flood was just another ... ’ which Mrs B finishes by adding:

“Challenge, yes, it’s a good way to live because you’ve got to make your life as good and as happy as you can, you’ve got to get something good out of it ... I’m a fairly positive person I guess you could say”.

Mrs B continues to construct her self-efficacy and independence in the following story she gives when I ask her about her possessions that were ruined in the flood. She responds by telling about the gypsy life she had led. During this nomadic period of her

life she said she had left important items with family who could be relied on to care for them in her absence:

“You’ve got to re-establish yourself somehow or rather, you know, and so those sort of things I didn’t need them with me ... I’ve always been independent and free and I don’t have baggage that I can’t live without, and I’ve learned that it doesn’t matter, it doesn’t matter. I could leave home with that purse and my medication you know. I have got my cash flow card and things that are essential, and if I had to, I could make do, yeah it wouldn’t frighten me, so there’s nothing that I couldn’t live without”.

I comment that the travelling light over her previous years may have been a bonus for her with regards to coping with possessions lost in the flood. Mrs B replies to my comment by telling how she had spent 5 years minimizing her possessions in preparation to leave her husband:

“And by the time the 5 years had gone by I was an expert at minimizing, there was no paperwork, no letters to me ... everything was minimized, it was gone and yeah it was a good thing really because you don’t depend on anything anymore. You know you can live without all that stuff ... Like as I say people thought that I would be shattered [referring to the 2007 flood] you know, and I think because of the life I’ve led I wasn’t, and because I had insurance, but if I hadn’t had insurance you’d be talking to a different lady, I’d be so angry with myself ... and I think that’s what made it easier for me, plus being an independent sort of person anyway”.

The theme of independence and capability was also reflected in the contrasting story about her cat and the negative effect that the flood had on her pet.

“My cat suffered more than I did, poor little thing...and when I finally got back here [her refurbished flat], and she realized I was going to be living here she came in, but you know she came in low, like a frightened feral cat

... she was terrified ... it took about 5 months for her to become my pet again it was upsetting really”.

Mrs B talked about finding a temporary place to stay in a motel and later finding an unfurnished flat as temporary accommodation, again her independence and capability to manage is demonstrated:

“So I was able to get all the stuff I needed ... I knew exactly what I wanted, and so I just got it and had it all delivered down there [to her temporary accommodation] ... I maximised everything, I bought very carefully ... ” [I begin to comment: So out of an event ... which Mrs B completes]: “that’s supposed to be bad it turned out pretty good”.

A final orienting question I asked was: what part of the flood event stood out for her? Initially she begins by saying:

“The flood was just another day to me, like people say its terrible...to me its just another day, its just living, this is what life is you know, you get rain, you get sunshine, you get floods, you get hurricanes ... there’s nothing you can do about it, its just life, you live you get old you stay young ... its [the flood] not strong in my mind its just another part of living”.

Mrs B continues to tell me why the flood was just another day for her. It is a significant story that not only demonstrates how the flood event is biographically interwoven into her life story but also as a relational way of understanding her experiences of the flood:

“It’s normal, you can expect it to happen, like they say we’ve never had so much rain for 30 years, well obviously 30 years ago they must have had the same thing, its just another day. No it didn’t really, ahm, ahm, this, this is personal and it doesn’t worry me saying it, but I was phobic for 30 years and if you know anything about being a real serious phobic its not a little fear, it’s not about spiders or something, it was an all enveloping

terrifying phobia and I lived on sleeping pills and pacifiers for 30 years that was frightening, that's why nothing worries me".

A very detailed account is given about her treatment and recovery from her phobia. The story ends when she evaluates and compares her experience of the flood and recovery, with her story of recovery from being a phobic:

"So therefore nothing in life will ever be that bad again. You need to go through something really bad to appreciate life, you do...so to me a little flood isn't much".

Mrs B's story was focused on how she maintained her independence and autonomy throughout the flood disaster. She biographically linked the flood to her past stories of independence and personal agency, which she used to construct her identity. Mrs B also expressed her personal life experiences in a comparative way to explain why the flood disaster was not appraised as having a major impact on her life. Mrs B's experiences of the disaster as an older adult reflected her personal coping strategies and experiences, which were used to respond to the disaster. Also identified within her narrative was her evaluation of her own independence in the flood, contrasted with her assessment of who needed help: emergency services help those pensioners who cannot look after themselves.

Mrs C

Mrs C experienced isolation as a result of the flood in terms of feeling vulnerable with regards to her health needs. Early in the interview she expressed that one of the reasons for coming to live in Kaitaia was because the town she previously was in was "too cold and damp". Her move to Kaitaia was initiated because of her vulnerable health status and because a family member lived in the area. After the flood, Mrs C went to live with the family member who lived some distance from the Kaitaia township. However, she had concerns about her health, and the distance she was from medical services:

"I was out there for about 3 weeks, but I couldn't hack it out there by myself because she [family member] works and I was home all day by myself".

The most worrying aspect for Mrs C was the isolation she experienced and the attendant worry that her location would make it difficult for emergency services to find her should she need medical assistance. The reality of this isolation was triggered when there was a delay in the arrival of someone from the social support agency coming to collect Mrs C to take her to a flood victim's afternoon tea and evening dinner. The resulting uncertainty arising from the delayed arrival of her transport was evaluated in the following excerpt:

“And I thought if anything happens to me, because I've got a medic alarm, if anything happens, how are they going to find me? That's what kept going through my mind all the time, they mightn't get here because they might not be able to find us”. I was just frightened ... so I got back into town smartly”.

Her return to town gave her the opportunity to permanently reside in a new area with other older people, some of which had also been through the flood. But Mrs C chose to return to the same pensioner flat units, which had been refurbished after the flood, despite two women from the flooded pensioner flats deciding to relocate:

“No they didn't want to come back here, but the silly thing is they're right beside a big river down there, whereas we've only got a little wee creek you know, but no they weren't game enough to come back”.

Mrs C stated that the main reason for returning back to the same pensioner flat environment was the proximity to the township so that she could walk, rather than rely on a taxi for transport. I ask was her choice also influenced by the fact she was returning to a community that was familiar. She responds by saying:

“There's a group of people actually tonight we're all going out for tea, oh well six of us are going out for tea ... we do it once a month”. [I ask: 'is that something that has happened since the floods?']. “Yeah, we got a couple of people who weren't in here before ... and I said one day, 'cos we used to do it in the other town I shifted from, our little court used to go out once a month for dinner, and I said to somebody here why don't we do it?

We weren't going to do it over the winter months, but we did, we all get out together anybody who has a birthday, we celebrate their birthday, so it's a good little clique down here at the moment".

An important orienting question that I asked towards the end of the interview was: What helped get you through the flood and into the recovery stage? Her response initially focused on her own personal approach to life:

"Nothing worries me, well it's [the flood] happened, that's it, full stop, and coming back here I felt much more settled once I came back into here" [her refurbished flat].

A significant story follows which links the flood to Mrs C's giving up smoking. This story is told in response to me asking: Was the most trying time possibly when you were living in temporary accommodation away from the Kaitaia township and you felt isolated?

"Yes that was the hardest part for me being out there, doing nothing all day more or less, and then this worry that if anything happened I mightn't get a ambulance in time, because by then yeah I had given up smoking then, because I had still been smoking and that was making me worse. But if anyone had said 'have a smoke' on the night of the flood I would have said yes. But my [a family member] smoked and I sat out there with her and it didn't worry me after the flood and I thought, oh this will be it, I'll be wanting to smoke all the time. But no it didn't worry me".

I ask: so you thought this would be a real test?

"Yes, well it was a real test, yeah, 'cos she went to work one day and I went out and sat on this chair where she sits outside and there was a packet which I thought was empty packet of smokes ...and I opened it up and there was one smoke in it and I said to her, are you trying to tempt me leaving one smoke behind. But no I wasn't even tempted to light up, [Mrs C had only been smoke-free for 6 months] yeah so there was still that

sometime urge to have a smoke. But I knew that once I did it that would be it, I wouldn't be able to stop again, so I was determined not to try again, it was the end of me if I tried again".

At this point I begin to make a comment but Mrs C completes my sentence, I begin by saying: Wow, resisting smoking having just come through the flood was a real sign of your ...

"Strength, yeah it made me feel better about myself, being able to not do it sort of thing, it was good. I think that's what helped a lot was being able to know I hadn't gone back to that type of thing [smoking]".

Within the context of Mrs C's narrative on about smoking, was her self-affirmation about successfully remaining smoke-free, appraised in the following words: "so I'm doing pretty good".

Through her story Mrs C has established points of reference between her body, self and the flood disaster. The flood event does not stand as a separate event, the contingent nature of narrative created a sense of order and coherence to the events and actions. Mrs C's narrative on health and smoking and her experiences of the flood are biographically integrated within her flood story to convey meanings about self-efficacy and identity.

Mrs K

The flood represented an expression of practical and emotional care extended to Mrs K, which went beyond the flood event to provide a narrative that centred on continued care and social support. Mrs K had only been living in the town a few years before the 2007 flood. I asked the reason why she had come Kaitia:

"I was ill and my daughter brought me up here to look after me and I was only here 5 months and she [her daughter] died".

After her daughter's death Mrs K was left in the situation of having to find a new place to live. She was assisted by the social support agency where Mrs K worked. This

agency later played a key role in assisting her after the flood. At about the time her daughter died she was reacquainted with an old school friend who she knew from sixty years ago. This school friend offered her a place to stay for 4-5 months after her daughter's death until a pensioner flat became available (the one she was in when it flooded). Within the story of being reacquainted with her friend there was also her biographical history detailing her early family role as a mother and nurturer from the time she was a young teenager after her mother died:

“Because my mum left six of us and a day old baby and so I reared them all, and they [her school-friend's family] often wondered was I still alive or what happened to me ... I got a shock actually because over the years you never meet any of your old friends, your old schoolmates, and I had to come all the way up to here to meet her”.

Mrs K had been in her pensioner flat just under two years before the flood occurred, and described the flat environment as a supportive community. Within Mrs K's description of the pensioner community is the recurring theme of her mothering others in her neighbourhood:

“I knew them all, and sort of mothered you know how you do, mothering them - make sure they are all right”.

After the flood Mrs K was given accommodation in another group of pensioner flats and tells the story of how she was able to get a larger two bedroom flat than her previous one bedroom flat. This is an important story in relation to demonstrating the effect of the care Mrs K received after the disaster, and the effect that it had on a woman who had spent most of her life in the context of caring for others.

“So I was allowed to pick my unit ‘cos I was the first here, so I picked the one next door, so when they [council] came about a week or a fortnight after, they said to me come on we're going to sign you up for your unit and they came to here [the flat she is now living in] and they said, we're going to give you a 2 bedroom unit seeing as you have the girls [her grand daughters whose mother had died] come to stay, so that is how I am in

here. They [the council] said we've heard about all the good things you've done for the community and for people, it's time - I'm a giver not a taker and I was crying, because people were giving me this and giving me that you know, it did upset me, and they said we're going to give you a 2 bedroom place because you've been so good and it will save you bringing the beds in and out. I was looked after really well, and I'm saying no it's all right, it's all right and they said, just quieten down, you've helped everyone now it's your turn to be helped".

Mrs K reflected on all the help she had received to settle in to her new flat, and how supportive her new neighbourhood community is:

"So it's been a trying time, its made me ahm, I don't know what it's made me ...[I ask Mrs K if perhaps it was a loss of confidence after the flood] ... "yes, you sort of ahm, I had such a lot of support from [names social support organization]. They have been marvellous, and the people around, a lot of my friends have been good".

Mrs K returns to the value of the friendships she has made since the flood, but significantly she links the social support she has received since the flood and the value she places on the companionship and friendship that has been given to her, with grieving over her daughter's death and other family members who have died:

"And a lot of people I didn't know have now become my friends and some of them are here [in the nearby flats], most of us in here are flood victims, and we have all got to know each other...and we had a group at the [social support agency] and we met there and then they come and visit, we've become good friends yeah, and I think it is the grieving part, it was, 'cos I was still grieving for my daughter, and then this [the flood] happened, yeah and ahm, the last 4 years has been a bit tough. I don't think I will get over my daughter. I've had a lot of deaths, lost all my brothers except one and I've got one sister. The last 12 years since I lost my husband, I've lost all the family. The family has gone one after the other, and here I am the eldest of them all and I'm the eldest standing, no aunties. I dread to have a

family funeral ‘cos I’m the eldest ...so I am going to Australia for Christmas, so I think my luck is changing. But if I didn’t have my friends and all at the [social support agency] I think I would have been really lost”.

Within the context of Mrs K’s story about loss, is the sense that the flood and her identity as a flood victim has provided her with an affirmed and legitimate status as a victim to an unforeseen flood; someone who in this role can receive and accept help in a socially legitimate way. In this context, “receiving help may not be self-esteem threatening because social comparison processes enable victims to discover that many others share the same fate” (Kaniasty and Norris 1995, p. 449). From the beginning of the Kaitia post-flood recovery response there was ongoing practical and emotional support available for flood victims. The provision of ongoing social support suggests that the naturally occurring helping behaviours within the community provided Mrs K with flood recovery support. The social support also provided her with the opportunity to express and reflect on the loss of her daughter and other family deaths in a supportive psychosocial environment. When I asked Mrs K what would have happened without the support she stated:

“Well I was ready to give in, I was ready to chuck it all in and I did get a bit ill, but I’ve had four strokes and I get this very high blood pressure and I thought by now I would have had another stroke but the Lord seems to have held me up you know. Some days I have to fight I must admit and some nights when I go to bed I don’t think I’ll see morning you know it’s just ... [I ask: you get a little bit more vulnerable?] “Yeah sometimes, but then I get a lift and away I go and I’m all right for a while”... [I ask: so the lift comes in all sorts of guises?] “Yeah in different ways, somebody says something which is good, yeah so ... [I comment: yes its those small things] ... the little things, the little things ... [I comment: those gifts of charity that help life go on] ... true, true and I sort of mother people you know. My Mum died when I was thirteen and a half and I have learnt to love people and mother them, so there is always something to do or think about”.

I comment to Mrs K that as a result of the flood that she had had the experience to be mothered instead. Her reply was to agree with what I had said. She then went on to refer to a neighbour who had brought a meal over to Mrs K while we were conducting the interview:

“You know to have things done for you like when J [neighbour] came to the door with my dinner, ahm it stirs my heart or something, it sort of oh you know, and I’ve had lunch out today, I went to see how L [neighbour] was across the road, I went to see how she was ‘cos she is 86, [and L said] you’re just in time for a cup of tea and I’ll make you a sandwich ... [I say: it’s that real sense of community isn’t it?] ...Yeah it’s lovely, it’s good”.

The interview ended with this affirmative statement. The flood and the meanings about the flood were biographically integrated so that her experiences of the flood were reflected on in the context of care and support that she received. The narrative about the flood was not a separate event from Mrs K’s life story as a nurturer to others. The flood reaffirmed values that were central to her identity as a nurturer. The importance of social support in Mrs K’s narrative also reflected the cultural value of altruistic social support from the community. The mobilization of social support is consistent with research by Kaniasty and Norris (1995) where older adults who faced threats to their lives or health following Hurricane Hugo were provided “with levels of tangible and informational assistance usually reserved for younger victims” (p.471).

Mr T

Mr T’s flood story was about social support and the importance he placed on situating himself within his social networks, as a way to express identity and belonging. (The theme of social support was also a common theme across all participants and is discussed later in the thesis).

My interview began with me asking him how long he had lived in Kaitaia. Mr T replied that he came to the region when he retired, and then tells the story of a series of green-keeping jobs that he was asked to do. The importance of his identity as a green-keeper becomes evident:

“And people came to me and wanted me to go back to be a green keeper so I went back into being a green-keeper”.

Following a few years of this job he returned to Kaitaia where another job opportunity arose:

“They [bowling club] came to me, looking for me, and they wanted to know would I go back out and be a green keeper, ‘cos I had retired by then ... and I thought to myself, do I really want to be a green-keeper? So I finally gave in, and I went back to the meeting on the Sunday and at the meeting I said to them, yes I will take the job, but you have to shift me, and they said no problem”.

Health problems intervened after a number of years and Mr T was no longer able to look after the greens. It also meant that new accommodation needed to be found in Kaitaia:

“So my home support lady she said, I know where some pensioner flats are ... so the cheeky pair of us we get out of the car and poke our nose up against the window” [of the empty flat].

He goes on to say that when he found out the flat was vacant he enlisted the help of another longstanding friend for her opinion. Mr T subsequently moved into this pensioner flat and had been there 2 years before the 2007 flood occurred. I asked what he liked about the area he was living in. The importance of caring social networks was a feature of the description:

“It was nice and quiet, it was quiet at night and you had a lot of old people, a lot of them my age, until we got washed out [reference to the 2007 flood] ... I can walk to the shops ... and do a bit of shopping ... I could walk up the road and go to bowls and walking was good for my hip repairs and my friends A and N, I played bowls with them many a time and they more or less looked after me and D [care giver] looked after me”.

Mr T's sense of being looked after is continued when he tells of being rescued from his flat during the flood:

“I get a knock on my door and a joker yelled out ‘A’ [Mr T's first name], I said ‘yeah’, he said, hurry up and get out of here”.

Mr T tells the story of how the fireman carried Mr T on his back out of the flat, and the laughter that followed when the fireman fell in the water when he was carrying Mr T:

“Gee we laughed ... [I asked did he know his rescuers] ... oh yeah, they knew me, a lot of the boys in the fire brigade knew me, through bowls and different places”.

In response to me asking where he stayed after the flood, Mr T gives a detailed account of people who assisted him in numerous accommodation changes after the flood and how his care giver and friends who looked after him, actively found a more suitable flat that he could finally resettle into. Friends went out of their way to help him move. In the following excerpt Mr T tells how an old family friend assisted:

“She even borrowed her husband's land rover and trailer and they shifted me here, and members of the bowling club which I am a member of, and they said, no trouble, we'll shift A” [referring to Mr T].

The importance of social recognition and identity as a bowler is again referred to when I asked him about meeting new people in the area he has relocated to since the flood:

“I play bowls against them [referring to the new neighbours N and C] and they knew that I was moving in and they were quite happy and every morning I want to go for a walk down the road, N says ‘where are you going?’ [Mr T replies] ... to get a Sunday News. N says, ‘no, no, no, I'm going to get a Sunday News, you go back home’. So he orders me back home and brings me a Sunday News to read”.

The sense of being cared for is a feature in Mr T's story. I ask if there was any particular moment that stood out about the flood:

“Oh yeah, C came to me and we were having a bit of trouble with insurance and that [after the flood], and D explained to her and I explained to her, and C said give the insurance claim to me. So I gave it to her and she went away, she probably stood on her head to get things done, and they [insurance] said we are only going to give him this. And C turned around and said ‘no, no he needs more than that’ [referring to the amount of money needed to replace the loss of his flood damaged possessions] and so everything was paid for”.

The importance of being looked after is expressed in the following story about attending regular monthly dinners for victims of the flood:

“Oh it [the dinners] was marvellous, every fortnight they [social support agency] would come and pick you up and bring you home again and the lady that had come to pick me up, we went out that night and when we got back, I took the wrong key. So she didn't panic, she gets on her little buzzer here [cell phone] and she said sit yourself in the corner there, and she gets rings up, and her husband turns up and he says, ‘I've come to rescue you again A [Mr T's first name]. So he went around to the back of the unit and he pulled the rubbers out of the window, took the window out and came over the sink bench to let us in”.

The importance of social recognition by others is described when Mr T talked about attending the dinners:

“The lady that ran it [the flood dinners] for us, she made a speech and said this is what's going to happen to the people until Christmas time...but I was lucky when I went down [to the flood dinners] I knew probably half of them, I had something to do with them, it was easy for me - like a lady who shifted from this area, and she is a bowler, and she said to me, where are you now, I said here in Kaitaia, and she says are you still a green-keeper, I said yeah, still a green-keeper, she said she was moving [away

from Kaitaia] to play bowls. But I run into bowling people all the time if I am going to the supermarket with D [care worker], it's amazing how many people say hello [to me].”

Mr T's identity in the community as a well-known green-keeper prior to the flood is biographically linked to the flood event; his rescuers knew him, those at the flood dinner evenings knew him, and he is recognized wherever he goes in the community. Mr T's experience about the flood has been expressed in the stories he told about being looked after and being recognised within the community. His stories were strongly linked to constructing his identity as a green-keeper through the social relations he described, which functioned to create a sense of order and coherence to the flood disaster. The continued social support assistance Mr T received prior to, during and after the after the flood is also important in his story. The recognition of the important function of social relationships and social connectedness can also be considered at a broader level to reflect public narratives around care and protection of older adults.

Mr W

Mr W moved to Kaitaia after he retired, and had only been in his pensioner flat about five months before the flood occurred. He described his role within the pensioner flat community as being an able bodied and capable person. This was reflected in his account of the flood and his ability to provide support to other more vulnerable pensioners:

“Yes I think everybody was taken by surprise, of course the older ones you had trouble getting them out of their houses and convincing them to move. There was one old joker, Mr F and they couldn't get into his house because he had barricaded all the front doors up, so we had to go round the back ... and then carry him out in his chair because he wasn't going nowhere. The old lady next to me I helped, and Mr F I helped, but after that, the fire brigade had got most people out ... I was more worried about the lady 'cos she had dementia next door to me, but she was OK, and old Mr F when they [fire brigade] came back to me when I was grabbing bags of stuff, [and they asked] does anybody live there [referring to Mr F's flat] and I said, you've got to go around the back door to get into his place. So

we went around the back and I showed them how to get in there and he was sitting in his chair and he wasn't going no-where, well he was 90".

Self-competence and sense of responsibility is also reflected in his role within the pensioner community prior to the flood:

"Well I was the youngest here, so I ended up the head man doing all the odd jobs and that, like changing the light bulbs 'cos they are all over in their eighties and nineties in some cases".

A biographical account of Mr W's self-competence is storied when I ask him was there a particular time that stood out for him during the flood:

"No not really, I think the hardest part was watching my car go [flood damaged and was not insured] and going through all your years and years of photographs and that, you couldn't even read half of them you know, they were just completely gone blank everything was washed off them, but no, I am lucky, I've been through all these turmoils and that. I was in the navy for a very long time, so the stress, it affected them [the pensioners], but it didn't me 'cos the stress was part and parcel of the job. They [other pensioner flood victims] took it hard and ah, they are all over it now, they are all over it, none of them mentions anything about the flood only when it rains. No I am over it ... but I suppose it affected a lot of people, it will of more so the older ones".

Mr W's evaluation of the stress of the flood not affecting him, which he attributes to his time in the navy, is exemplified in the post-flood story he tells of one woman who has not settled. The account of this woman also constructs a sense of social vulnerability that exists in the pensioner community:

"One lady, she's changed houses about 4 times since the flood and yet she's back here and she moved because she was frightened it was going to flood again, and I said 'no it wont happen', but no she moved again and where she moved to I said, 'you know you're going to get flooded there',

and then she moved back to here, and she's just changing her house again, she's a hypochondriac".

His practical competence and ability to deal with stressful situations, provides an orientation in which to understand Mr W's story of rescuing furniture. He saved two armchairs damaged in the flood, which had belonged to his mother. The floodwater that flowed through the pensioner flats was contaminated, which resulted in many of the pensioners being requested to throw away most of the contents in their flats. Mr W actively resisted instructions by the clean up personnel to discard all flood-damaged possessions. He tells the story of how he saved the armchairs:

"There was no way I was going to throw them away, so I just sat at home at my mate's place and hosed them all down and cleaned them up, threw disinfectant all over them and then stowed them ... but they [the authorities] came back looking for them, I wouldn't tell them where I'd hidden them, they were adamant that they wanted this and that".

A further demonstration of self-competence and determination within the context of the flood relates to improving the standard of his pensioner flat accommodation by shifting to a more sunny aspect. This final evaluation from Mr W is the conclusion of the interview:

"Well, I never got used to my place (his flooded flat) and so when I found out that this was going to be vacant, I just rang up and they [the council] said go put your stuff in straight way ... I am quite happy with where I am, it will do me".

Mr W's story of the flood was about personal agency and coping, which were biographically integrated with reference to his earlier life experiences of self-efficacy and coping. The flood story Mr W told demonstrated his ability to cope with the stress of the flood and reaffirmed his identity as an able bodied figure in the pensioner community.

At a broader community level, Mr W's story also can give an insight into the pre- flood vulnerabilities within the pensioner community. He talked about the assistance he gave other pensioners to do all the odd jobs such as changing light bulbs, inferring that due to their age "they are all over in their eighties and nineties" that they were in need of assistance. He also expressed concern about some of his neighbours who he helped on the night of the evacuation mentioning that one pensioner had dementia and some of the older ones needed convincing to get out of their houses.

Rest Home Narratives

Mr G

Mr G has been living in the rest home for 6 years prior to the 2007 flood. Prior to his move to the rest home he had been living alone for about twenty since the death of his wife. He moved to the rest home because he couldn't bear the loneliness of living alone anymore:

"Well, since I came here, well the loneliness disappeared ... So when you are old there's a lot of people that don't want much to do with you and I've been happy here ever since".

This sense of isolation is repeated in the context of the flood when Mr G states that:

"The flood is something I will never forget, it was a big occasion for me and ah you are sort of shut off from the outside world and when a thing like an evacuation, oh that is something most unusual".

There was a sense of inclusion and involvement with the flood event. His lifelong knowledge of the area gave him the opportunity to give anecdotal advice that he felt helped to inform others about the floodplain.

"Something I appreciated because you're able to advise someone else sometimes, because I had seen floods before here, it was normal for quite a while over the years I mean".

The flood had a big impact on Mr G in terms of enabling him to be part of an important event. When I asked him if he talked about the floods to others after his return to the rest home, he stated:

“Oh yes I found out who made the decisions to evacuate and what went on ... The people up at the gymnasium [set up as a welfare centre for those who were mobile], slept on mattresses. The mattresses came from here [rest home] and they had enough up there to bed them down for the night ... and it [the flood] is something I will never forget to be honest. I have great respect for these chaps that made the decisions because our lives depended on it ... it’s a very important facet of my life. I have been in floods but nothing like it could have been, and I know what a flood, the damage they can do”.

Integration of the flood event as part of Mr G’s biography is evident in the following excerpt when I ask him to clarify that the flood was “a very important facet of my life”:

“Oh well, I’ve been through a lot of experiences in my life and that’s one of them [the flood] that I will never forget, because I was in the war and I saw things there and when I compare them, this [the flood] stands out. I’ve been very lucky in my life and saw a lot of my mates killed and all that, and this is something I will always think about how lucky I was, and here I am today”.

Mr G’s active interest in the flood is clearly linked to his outlook and general interest about world events:

“I’m very interested in what is going on in the world today and who is going to be the new president of America and who is going to win over Helen Clark and I read that stuff everyday, and I find it fulfilling, I’ve talked to you now, I will never forget that”.

The rest home response to the flood reaffirmed Mr G's decision to live in the rest home. In the context of the flood, the rest home was still able to provide care and protection for him and the residents:

“We were in wheelchairs by the door and the other unfortunate people or more than me to get on the buses, but I knew our time would come and it would be alright because when I saw these chaps who were the bosses, they play it safe ... you see I have great confidence in them, they are positive thinkers and this bloke who I was talking to, he was very positive about it and I have great confidence in those people, and it's something I'll never forget, because my life is just about over and that was a big event”.

I ask the question whether the care he experienced during the flood confirmed his decision to move into the rest home. Mr G responds to this question by telling me how his life had been after his wife had died, particularly the loneliness and the realization that:

“As your health goes down and people avoid you ... I thought there was something better than this, there is nothing here, this isn't home, and the loneliness will kill you in the finish, and what struck me when I came here, the number of nurses that say good day to you and the loneliness disappeared overnight”.

Within this narrative Mr G affirms his decision-making skills relating to his move into the rest home. His decision to move into the rest home also relates to the importance he placed on preserving the dignity of self in old age:

“And my sons came down, two of them and they wanted to take me home because I think that they thought the rest home was a home for old dead ends. My daughter was all right, because she was working and would have had to help me and I thought that was selfish. And I had a few bob in the bank and I thought, spend the rest of your life in a reasonable manner and I don't regret it in any way”.

Mr G returns to reflecting on ageing when I ask if he wonders what is going to happen when its been raining a day or two, he replies:

“A lot of people talk about the past, but I look towards the future, this is a better part of your life and its just about finished and I’ve always thought that I’ve made the right decisions.”

The care he received during the flood disaster confirmed his need for care and protection. Mr G’s narrative is framed within the context of frail old age and dependency in a rest home environment. He biographically integrated the flood event with his decision to move to the rest home by giving details about his past, which confirmed his ability to make the right decisions in life. The flood was also perceived as a shared event that enabled Mr G to feel linked once again to the wider Kaitaia community. He felt involved in how the flood was managed, and he appreciated being able to contribute advice based on his previous experience of a flood in Kaitaia. He also storied the flood event to express biographical detail relating to a previous flood and to his time in the war, as a way of comparing life experiences and linking these events together into a coherent story.

Embedded within Mr G’s personal story are broader socio-cultural narratives around ageing, which relate to community isolation and old age. Also, attitudes about living in a rest home environment versus being cared for by family were also identified by Mr G when he talked about the changing traditional expectation of the role of family caring for dependent parents.

Mrs G:

Mrs G had only been a resident in the rest home for about 4 months prior to the flood. She was not from the local area and had moved to Kaitaia to be closer to her sons. Her move to the rest home was unexpected:

“The boys [her sons] just came into the flat ... and said just pack an overnight bag we’re off, we are going up, you are going to be living at [name of rest home]. So that was a bit rushed as it was. My sons said,

‘we’ll come back and finish the flat, do what has to be done’. So I was sort of getting over that and then the flood too”.

An understanding of Mrs G’s need for care is expressed in telling about her sons’ decision to relocate Mrs G closer to them:

“It was too far for them to come down, a five hour trip if I was sick to come and see me and care for me, so they decided that they’ll bring me up here ... so when a room came up I just had to go”.

The unexpectedness of the relocation, and the flood are expressed by Mrs G when she describes her move to the rest home:

“It just came as a surprise, a shock ... I was still getting used to the routines and things of living in a [rest] home”.

The recent unexpectedness of her relocation to the rest home was linked to the flood evacuation in the following evaluation:

“I thought does this go on all the time ... and I wondered where I’d come to ... they said it was beautiful weather up here ... the winterless north and I went straight into the flood”.

I asked Mrs G whether she was worried about the flood evacuation:

“Well sort of, we were a bit apprehensive, but when we got there they had all the mattresses there on the floor, everything was made up for us, and everybody was wonderful, they were all caring people making sure we were OK”. [I comment that it would have been strange sleeping on the floor]. “Yes it was very difficult, but we did it, but worse things happen ...” [I ask her about what she means by worse things happen, she replies] “We went through the wartime so you know, its not as if I hadn’t had any experiences”. [I comment in agreement that the trials and difficulties were not that strange to her]. Mrs G replies “No, no, I sort of accept what

comes, and everybody was doing it [giving assistance to the flood victims] for our benefit, we were lucky, everybody was lovely”.

Within Mrs G’s story is a strong narrative theme of being cared for, which I will discuss under a separate heading later in my thesis, as it was a recurring theme for all the rest home participants. Mrs G’s biographical theme is linked with the importance of being cared for in the following excerpt:

“Well I haven’t been through a flood like that in all my life, but as I say everybody was concerned for our safety and that was the main thing” [I ask: and that helped?] “Yes, yes knowing that you could rely on them, we weren’t on our own, they did everything that was all right for us”.

The importance of how well Mrs G was looked after in the flood has a relationship to her unexpected move into the rest home. The theme of a caring environment that she experienced during the flood evacuation, suggests that the flood was a positive experience that enabled Mrs G to feel more established in her new environment of the rest home:

“And if it happens again I’d say we don’t have to worry too much as I trust them ... it’s good to know that you can trust those who are caring for you, even the girls came back from their homes and came and stayed with us that night and they looked after us too ... and it was such a comfort to see them [I comment: I’m sure, the familiar faces] it’s like your parents coming in you know, you didn’t have to worry”.

A sense of home and place remains a strong focus in the final part of the narrative interview. From a narrative perspective Mrs G’s experience of the flood is expressed through the organizing schemes that link her identity as a vulnerable older adult with her need for care. The following excerpt is Mrs G’s response to my enquiring if she had talked about the flood event when she was back at the rest home:

“Well I think we were all in a bit of a shock, it doesn’t take much when you are old ... it’s a bit bewildering, but we settled down again.” [I ask: did

it take long to settle down?] “Not really, once we were in our home in our own surroundings we were OK, for me it was all right” [I ask: was it a bit like when you go away and come home again?] “Yes that’s what it felt like, oh it’s good to be home, well it is our home, at least we are able to have our own rubbish around us in our own rooms [I ask: all your special memories?] “Yes all my teddy bears ... I collected teddy bears before I came here, my other flat was full of them, so I just said to my son give me some out of the bag [to take to the rest home]”.

I comment that her teddy bears are up high in her room and would have been safe from the floodwaters:

“They would have been ... you’ve got to make home yourself, for what you like surrounding you ... I’ve always, I don’t know why, but I’ve always been mad about teddy bears it must have been because I never had any as a child, I’m making up for lost time, because we came through the depression years you know, there were no toys like these, so I make up for it now, they all represented something”.

Mrs G’s relocation from her independent flat tells a particular story of transition from independent living to dependent living in an aged care facility in the context of the flood event. Within Mrs G’s narrative are themes of care and protection, which were biographically integrated in her account of the flood. Her experience of the war was recalled as an explanation for how she coped in the flood, which helped her to accept what happened during the flood and evacuation. Ageing in the context of personal and social vulnerability are also reflected in the story she told of her sons’ reasons for wanting to relocate Mrs G to Kaitaia.

Miss J

Miss J did not want her interview to be audio recorded, but she gave her consent for me to take notes, the results and discussion represent what I was able to write down about her story of the flood. Miss J was “born and bred” in Kaitaia, but for over thirty years had lived away from this area. She had been living in the rest home for five years. I

asked her to tell me about the flood, Miss J talks about being given an evacuation ticket by the civil defence:

“I still have the evacuation ticket ... I didn’t find it disturbing, because I’ve seen more dead bodies than most people ... I was with the St John’s” [paramedical emergency organisation].

I asked about coping with the flood:

“It didn’t worry me, I went through the war years as a youngster, so it didn’t upset me. In the war you still had to milk and feed the animals. We all grew up taking things in our stride ... for as long as the war lasted. It was a struggle ... all the lads going [to the war] men manpowered out of it and the women manpowered onto the farms”.

Comparison to the war is again referred to when I ask Miss J if she talked with the other residents about the evacuation, her reply was:

“There was no real hardship, we were all fed. The staff and management were all terrific. It was like the war years, I never talked about it - it’s how we got on from the rest home. We were all given breakfast and went home and continued on as before we went away ... all went on [again] as if it hadn’t rained. We were all safe and looked after and that’s what counted”.

In response to my question as to what the evacuation centre was like, Miss J replies:

“The mattresses were similar to a hospital arrangement, there were six in our room ... that’s what you do when you are camping and I used to love going camping [I ask: so that was a camping experience?] “Yes [Miss J laughs] except no mosquitoes”.

The linking of the flood event to personal and social context is expressed when I ask about whether she knew the people she was sleeping next to at the evacuation centre.

She makes a relational comparison to the many recent deaths at the rest home and the impact of these deaths on her in the following excerpt:

“I knew them [rest home residents at the evacuation centre] ... of course people have died since then, about twenty of them [rest home residents]. I knew Mrs B [a rest home resident who had recently died, who I had been scheduled to interview] and her family, and I went to school with several of them. I think those deaths have more effect on you”.

Miss J then goes on to describe the rest home facilities and ends by evaluating herself and the environment of the rest home during the residents’ evacuation:

“I’m a little old lady at [name of rest home], there were no upsets, no people going berserk”.

I ask Miss J was she surprised about how orderly the evacuation was, again her response is situated in the context of her own biography:

“I’ve spent 35 years in the [names a region of New Zealand] and been through homes and asylums, so no I am not surprised by it. I’ve seen some terrible cases, a lot of its not pretty, I spent fifty years with St John [ambulance service] as a volunteer, you see a lot of things that people don’t see”.

I ask if she thought that her experiences helped her “maybe it did, I can’t see it because I have always done what I’ve had to do”. Miss J gives an example from her younger years to situate her self-efficacy:

“When I was working for the government and working in engineering I never had time to think of anything else, they were long hours. The engineering hours were 7.30 am to 7.30 pm and half a day on Saturday ... I learnt to drive trucks, tractors, bikes, shoot”.

In the context of a lifetime of having “done what I’ve had to do”, Miss J returns to the present by telling the story of why she is now living in the rest home, again it encompasses her attitude towards coping with whatever happens in life:

“I have had a back that has cost me \$10,000 ... I was watching my back operation and the staff said not to. But I said it’s my back and I want to know what’s happening to it. I was warned it [back operation] was dangerous”.

Miss J evaluates the outcome of her operation:

“Life hasn’t always been peaches and cream, [after the operation] I didn’t realize I couldn’t walk anymore ... I had my own home and car ... when I came to [the rest home] it was sudden, final and I wasn’t going to be able to look after myself ... it wasn’t hard to accept”.

Miss J’s narrative contains details about her personal and social world organized within the context the flood event, which were biographically integrated. The flood experiences also reflected the more difficult personal challenge of coping with living in the rest home where rest home deaths are a common event.

Mr J

Mr J had spent all his adult life in Kaitaia and had only been at the rest home a few months when it was flooded. The striking feature of his narrative was his detailed geographical knowledge about Kaitaia and the local river systems, which contributed to Kaitaia’s vulnerability to flooding. Mr J’s detailed understanding of Kaitaia’s geography was framed in the context of his personal vulnerability in a flood. He also talked about of the vulnerability of others in the rest home, as these residents were even more dependent on others for help than he was:

“Kaitaia’s built in the wrong place, three rivers meet to come through Kaitaia, there’s the Takahui, there’s Victoria Valley and the Fairburn River and they all meet out at what they call Double Crossing, which is

five miles from here, and they all meet at one place and of course it all makes a big flood”.

Mr J’s inclusion of his long-standing knowledge Kaitaia’s geography was reflected in how he comprehended what was happening on the night of the evacuation from the rest home:

“Well, we knew from when they [emergency services] said they were going to evacuate us, that it must have been fairly close to the stop-bank. So I am still rational, so I could put two and two together, you know a lot of them wouldn’t have known what was going on, but I was of sound mind so, I think I was, so I knew what was happening ... it would have been a tragedy because a lot of old people wouldn’t have got out, because it would have been dark and cold, but luckily the rain had stopped by then, but when you get swirling water around you, you don’t know where you are really”.

I asked was he worried about what was happening and Mr J replies in the context of the 2007 flood and the Kaitaia flood of 1958 that he had also experienced:

“No not really, no, I had in mind what I thought I would do if a flood came here, I would climb up and get up in the roof somehow or other. But of course, houses were swept away in the first flood we had in 1958, I think it was. [The water] flowed right through the town, we never had a stop-bank it was running through the hotel entrance, pouring out like a waterfall ... I was here then ... It went right through the main street there were photos of people rowing their boats in the main street”.

I asked Mr J if he was thinking of the 1958 flood during the time he was experiencing the 2007 flood. He replies that he thought that the 1958 flood could have been similar to the current flood, but returns to detailed talk about the flood protection measures that have occurred between 1958 and 2007 and finishes by evaluating the 2007 flood:

“But if the rain had kept going I suppose for another good hour we might have been in dire straits”.

I asked whether the 1958 flood was talked about when he was at the evacuation centre:

“Some of them [rest home residents] had been in an earlier flood - and we thanked, thanked, that the rain had stopped, if it hadn't stopped we would have been flooded again, even with the stop-bank, and as I said it would have been a tragedy, because a terrible lot of old people would never have got out of it, but they evacuated us up to the hospital and college, the water never reaches up there. But as I say the rain had stopped so the water wasn't rising when we came to be evacuated, but it was pretty close to the top”.

Mr J's detailed knowledge of the area is interwoven with his perceptions of personal and social vulnerability in the 2007 flood:

“If it had come in we would have lost our homes for the time being and I don't know where they would have put us”.

Before Mr J evacuated, he put his stamp album up high in anticipation of the floodwaters coming through the rest home [he was the only rest home resident I interviewed that was proactive in protecting treasured possessions]. He went on to describe the damaging impact of floodwaters and to discuss the vulnerability of the rest home residents and relocation issues, which he linked with his own personal background:

“But there's nothing much we could have saved or anything, if the water came in, well it ruins everything, there's so much silt with it, but you don't think water is full of silt, hundreds of tons of it, and the place would have been covered in silt. I just don't know what they would have done with all the people from here, some have homes to go to, they could go back to their homes, others who've got no homes, I had to sell my home before I came in here. I lost my wife some years ago, I could have gone to my

son's place he lives well up out of the water, that's if he could have got here, that's the point getting here to take me up there".

Mr J's long-standing local knowledge about the geographical vulnerability of Kaitaia together with the experience of the 1958 flood was biographically integrated into his account of the 2007 flood. Mr J's life long knowledge of the Kaitaia flood plain informed his understanding of the flood in the context of his aged related needs as a dependent and vulnerable older person in need of care and protection.

Summary

For all participants, in both the pensioner and rest home group, their experiences of the Kaitaia flood event were integrated and expressed within a biographical context. Their stories were both accounts of the disaster and accounts of identity that provided coherence and order. The participants actively linked the flood event to previous experiences (recent and distant past), which had occurred in their lives. The retelling of previous experiences functioned to affirm personal agency and capacity in the context of their current situation as either dependent or independent older adults. Each participant's experiences of the flood were co-constructed narratives between the teller and the listener. The speech excerpts were not decontextualised from the stories told, and remained intact within older adults' experiences of the 2007 Kaitaia flood disaster.

The pensioner narratives were expressions of identity, which encompassed: independence and self-reliance (Mrs B); self-efficacy and independence (Mrs C); nurturing and the need for social support (Mrs K); the importance of social support and social affirmation (Mr T); independence and competence (Mr W). At the wider socio cultural level, the pensioner narratives served to inform public narratives about: independence and ageing (Mrs B); self-efficacy in the context of old age (Mrs C); altruism (Mrs K); the importance of social support and social connectedness for older adults (Mr T); pre and post disaster vulnerability of older adults living in the pensioner flats (Mr W). The rest home narratives were expressions of identity which encompassed: dependence, previous life experiences and agency in the context of frail old age (Mr G); dependence, previous life experiences and agency in the context of frail old age (Mrs G); dependence, previous life experiences and agency (Miss J);

dependence, vulnerability in the context of the flood (Mr J). At the broader level, the rest home narratives served to inform public narratives about: ageing, isolation, and the changing traditional family roles relating to care of older adults (Mr G); ageing and the transition from independent to dependent living in a rest home context (Mrs G); ageing in a rest home context (Miss J); rest home residents' vulnerability in a disaster (Mr J).

The flood in the context of ageing: personal and social vulnerability

Introduction

The previous section on biographical integration explored how the flood was experienced as a personal event, which was referenced and integrated into each person's life story. At the broader level, the participants' disaster narratives expressed how the disruptive event was concurrently interwoven with self, others and the broader socio-cultural context. Narrative not only gives expression to personal experiences, there is also an inter-relationship between social and cultural discourses within the stories people tell about themselves. Phibbs (2008) argues that stories include a broader social commentary, which extend beyond the realm of the individual to encompass the socio-political context that individuals are inextricably linked to. Similarly, Murray (2004) states that people are constantly engaged in a process of negotiating the connection between their personal narratives and the dominant socio-cultural narratives. It is through the stories that people tell that we learn about the broader context of social life, which is shaped by social relations; "societal narratives are not value-neutral but represent various power interests" (Murray, 2004, p.99). However, power interests are not overt, they become the taken-for-granted way of understanding interpersonal social relations. Michel Foucault has written extensively on power relations and he argues that power is productive and is present in any social relation, rather than only through institutions (Lupton, 2006). Lupton (2006) argues that from a Foucauldian perspective, discourses, strategies, practices and institutions around a phenomenon "both reflect and construct a distinct approach to selfhood, society and the government of populations" (p.85).

Currently, the dominant cultural discourse on ageing in western countries like New Zealand is the public health concept of 'positive ageing' or 'successful ageing'. This cultural or meta-narrative is actively in use to engage western populations in the social, political and demographic issue of the increasing numbers of people who are living longer than previous generations. The public health messages that are in circulation around ageing influence social relations. The goal of 'positive ageing' is to encourage older people to remain active and independent within the community, in order to

address the anticipated health care burden from this population group. From a Foucauldian perspective, this focus on the health and fitness activity model to promote 'positive ageing' may act as a technique for creating subjectivities within norms of independence, health and wellness for older adults. When independence is used as a marker of successful ageing within the wider cultural discourse of 'positive ageing', older adults caught in a disaster may be disadvantaged. They may not prepare and respond to a disaster in a timely manner, because of norms around independence, may influence whether assistance or advice is sought. When a disaster occurs, coping independently and being self-reliant becomes more problematic because informational and practical resources may not be available within older adults' social networks. Furthermore, the ability to remain independent after a disaster may be lowered for some older adults if they do not receive assistance before and during a disaster.

Consideration of the location of the disaster will be briefly discussed so as to situate disaster vulnerability within the social environment of Kaitaia. The Kaitaia township is located in a flood prone area, and the location of the pensioner flats and rest home were close to the township. For the Kaitaia pensioners, their choice to live closer to shopping and community amenities may have been one of the reasons for choosing these flats, which could enable them to remain independent and self-reliant. However, they were also exposed to a greater flood risk because of their proximity to the stop bank. The consideration of environmental vulnerability may become less of a priority for this group as proximity to amenities becomes necessary to maintain independence. The location of the pensioner flats was also problematic for the pensioners because they lived in a geographically defined pensioner flat community. It is likely that the pensioner-only housing environment created an older aged neighbourhood with decreased social connectedness to the larger community. A more demographically diverse neighbourhood would more likely provide greater informational support and practical assistance in times of a disaster.

The pensioners did not realise that the amount of rain that had fallen in the area was posing a hazard, despite living next to the flood protection stop-bank (refer photograph, Appendix 6). They were completely unaware of the danger they were in and no one had contacted them during the day to check how they were. Consequently the pensioners were surprised and disbelieving when the firemen knocked on their doors telling them

to evacuate from their homes. The socio-cultural norms around self-reliance and independence of older adults may have increased the social vulnerability of older adults to a disaster. The pensioners' opportunity to being alerted about possible flooding in the town may have been constrained by their pensioner flat environment. Their flats were designated for pensioners only, which may have isolated them from a more demographically diverse community who could have given warning and assistance. A common theme within the pensioners' stories was around panic, lack of preparedness and vulnerability. Despite this, rather than attribute vulnerability to existing social conditions some participants suggested their age as an explanation for their disaster responses. The pensioners' explanations were congruent with the cultural norms around independence and self reliance.

Pensioner narratives

Coping with limited assistance

The pensioners were socially vulnerable as they were unaware that they were in any danger of being flooded, and no one had contacted them about potential flooding or the need to prepare. Three out of five pensioners evacuated with limited assistance; all pensioners had less than half an hour's warning to leave their flats:

Mrs C:

“Well I was sitting here watching TV on the Tuesday night and the fire brigade chap came to the door and said we might have to evacuate you all because the little creek over the back is coming up and I thought, ‘rubbish, that’s not going to flood’. I did put a couple of things in a toilet bag that’s about all I did and I sat down again and watched TV, and the next minute I hear this peculiar noise and I looked down to the floor over there and here was water bubbling under the glass and of course panic. So rush out and get some towels and then stick them down, and then I need more towels so I grabbed some more and I thought, no you stupid woman, and then it was coming in under the cupboards and I realized it was coming in the bathroom”.

After unsuccessfully trying to mop up the water with towels, Mrs C rang for help:

“And I rang the fire brigade or the police, I’m not sure who I rang and they were saying someone will come ... and nobody came, and the water was coming, slowly creeping across the room towards me”.

At this point Mrs C gathered up shoes on the floor, all her summer clothes that were in the wardrobe and threw them onto the bed.

“That’s about all I did”.

Her self-evacuation highlighted her personal vulnerability to the floodwaters as she left her flat, which she expresses in the following excerpt:

“I went out the back door and just about got bowled over with water, I didn’t realize that there was so much water out the back [I ask: so you were pretty much on your own?] Yeah the fire brigade men hadn’t got this far, they were getting the others out, but they hadn’t got to me and I went out the back door and I eventually managed to get the door shut, and I went up the back of the flats, it was pitch black because all the power was off ... And then when I came back the next day, all the rubbish containers from here plus anything else that had got washed around, it was all under the tree in the corner, and it went through my mind, if I’d fallen over, that was where I could have ended up down there with all the rubbish, because it was quite swift the water, and there was bits and pieces floating in it, you were banging into bits and pieces ... you couldn’t see ... [I comment: how frightening]. It was a wee bit, yeah, but it’s all gone now”.

Mrs C estimated that she had about a half hour warning to gather her things up. I reconfirm with her that she had rung 111:

“Well you don’t get Kaitaia now, when you ring 111 you get somewhere else and I can’t remember what she said now ‘cos I was starting to panic. I got out there and the others said, ‘oh the fireman got me out, the fireman

carried the old man of 93 [years] just up here, he got carried out', and all this and I didn't see any fireman, the only thing they rescued was my budgie".

The sense of panic that she experienced with coping on her own, appears to have influenced her planning and decision making skills in terms of prioritizing important items that could be taken.

"I just walked out with what I had on. I had my purse and this bag that I had my toilet bag in and I don't know why I put a little towel in, but I did and I think a change of underwear and that was about it".

I reply to Mrs C: I'm interested that you thought of taking personal things like your toilet bag:

"Yeah well I should have taken important papers, that was one of the things [the fireman] said, you know grab any important things, like your birth certificate, different things like that, but I didn't, I just took off. [I ask: Do you mind telling me why you didn't take those things?]. Oh it just didn't register. [I ask: Did you know where to locate these items really quickly or not?] If I'd stopped and thought about it, yes, but the water was sort of coming in, just get out, it's a bit like a fire, just get out, don't stay around, 'cos they [important papers] were in my bedside cabinet here beside the bed".

Mrs B

Mrs B was an independent and self-sufficient woman as evident in her biographical story of the flood. However, the emergency evacuation highlighted her personal vulnerability in a disaster. After she had been outside to talk with the fire brigade and been told that there might be water coming over the stop-bank she states:

"So I came in here [to her flat], and normally I am so good [talks about a previous flood she was in and the measures she took to protect her possessions] ... Well this time because it was dark, I don't know, somehow

I just got the creeps, I could feel the water running down my neck, almost you know, because we are sort of below it here [low lying land prone to flooding]. And I came inside all prepared to be sensible, and I really didn't know what to do because I couldn't see where the water was, how close it was to coming over. And so I came in here and I went in and I got a pair of track pants and then I just didn't want to be here. I just locked the door and left, got my medication and left. I got me and my car out to safety, that's my independence".

Mrs B's experience of panic was not how she expressed herself in the following excerpt, when I asked if she had thought that the previous days of continuous rain might cause a flood.

"I am quite aware we can get floods, but I don't panic that's all"

Her rationale was that emergency services prioritise assistance to vulnerable people:

"Because the first thing they do is head for the people here that can't look after themselves and they can help them get out ... but I am quite independent, so that's OK".

There are two positions on independence and competence to cope in a disaster: first, the panic experience in the context of her self-evacuation, which reflected the reduced social networks that were available to call on; and second, her post-flood assessment of being self-reliant and capable. This second position appears to be a broader discourse on ageing, independence and competence: there are dependent people that can't look after themselves but that she remains independent, self-reliant and competent to look after herself, even in a disaster situation. Ageing and competence was storied later in the interview when Mrs B talked about her independence in the context of being able to use her car to visit older adults. This subject reminded her of my information letter about research project when she says:

"When I read that it [the Information letter] says 'older people' I said, oh for crumbs sake, cos you never feel any different, so your thinking never

changes its just that your face looks older and people think that you're useless. You can't do strength movements, but your mind is still very alert until they [sic] get Alzheimers".

Mrs K

The flood was unexpected for Mrs K, when the fireman knocked on her door to inform her that she might have to evacuate, she was expecting he would tell her there was a fire. She had her three grand daughters staying with her that night, they were aged 15 years, 16 years, and a mother and baby. The following excerpts highlight Mrs K's vulnerability in a disaster. In the first excerpt, Mrs K attributed her age as the reason that she was not aware of the impending disaster and its effects:

"I grabbed my pillows and my handbag that I had bought the day before, I left my own one there [in the flat] with everything in it and took off, because I am scared of water. And when I walked out the front door it was up to my shins...and my grand daughter took me out ... I panic and I never thought about the water coming in my house, never gave it a thought, must be my old age".

I ask Mrs K about the items she took from the flat on the evening of the flood, she had just bought a new handbag, which she took with her, but she left her usual handbag behind in the flat:

"I left my old one [handbag] behind with all my money in and all in it, and my passport, everything. When they said water and I saw it at the backdoor, that was the finish and they ousted me into the car ... Oh my grand daughter grabbed the medication".

Mrs K evaluated the flood outcome in the context of ageing and vulnerability:

"But at any rate, we were all safe and no-one drowned or anything, that's what I thought was a blessing, none of the old people, one died [about 6 weeks post-flood] but that would be the shock".

Mr T

Mr T was personally vulnerable because he had poor mobility, and received assistance from the fire brigade to evacuate. Kaniasty and Norris (1995) in their research on social support mobilization following Hurricane Hugo found that older adults who faced threats to their lives and health experienced a pattern of concern. However, this pattern was not extended to assistance with property damage, where it was perceived that older adults needed less help because they lived in older, less expensive, but debt-free houses. Mr T saw flashing lights outside his window and wondered why the emergency services were there. It wasn't until someone from the fire brigade knocked on his door and called his name to tell him:

“Hurry up and get out of here. And I went to the door and I said are you playing a joke on me and he said no, grab a bag and if you've got medical stuff grab it, and he said you've got to get out of here. The water was coming through the door then, as quick as that”.

Mr T was assisted to leave his flat and he tells the story of the firemen helping him to evacuate, as his mobility was impaired due to recent hip replacements. Mr T had familiar people to assist him to evacuate, as he knew the firemen through his social networks. I asked what he had time to take with him:

“I just grabbed my bag which I always have some clothes in and I grabbed my medicine, I didn't even grab my wallet”.

Mr W

Mr W was unaware of the rising floodwaters:

“I was sitting at home at half past seven and I wondered why all these red lights were coming through my curtains until they knocked on the door and it was the fire brigade saying you had to move 'cos we were going to be flooded so I just grabbed the bare stuff and just walked out ... I never even knew they [fire brigade] were there, I was busy watching 'Close Up' [television programme] I think it was half past seven, twenty five past seven, I never even gave it a thought ... And I think most people were

quite surprised how quick, when it did start to flood, how quick it came through, as far as I was concerned it was just another rainy day”.

I asked whether Mr W had time to take what he wanted from his flat:

“No, no, all I got was my toilet gear and a couple of shirts and basic stuff and of course I didn’t believe that the water would come up to the height of my TV ... I never gave it a thought to put the TV up on something, there’s a lot of things when you’ve got to go. Because they [fire brigade] said go, there was no, oh I want to stay, you just had to get out”.

I asked was there anyone helping you to decide what to take?

“They did say to me grab your toilet gear and some clothes and that’s all I grabbed and just threw it in a bag and walked out”.

I asked were there other things that you took with you?

“No nothing, even left my car there, and that got ruined, it got flooded right through, no I never took nothing else. They don’t give you much time you know, just get out and move, and a lot of people lost a lot of stuff”.

Mr W was one of the youngest of the residents in the pensioner flats. He also gave assistance to some of his neighbours as well as assisting the fire brigade in gaining access to a nearby flat where his ninety-year old neighbour lived.

Loss of treasured possessions

The pensioners integrated their experiences of the flood event into their narrative to each tell their story of how they successfully escaped from the floodwaters. I have interpreted their flood stories as a way of expressing their independence, but also their vulnerability to the flood. The pensioners lost many possessions because their homes had over one metre of water flow through them. The representation of tangible objects

that were destroyed in the flood can be understood as a metaphor for vulnerability in relation to personal control and autonomy. Expressed within each person's narrative was a sense of personal vulnerability in relation to loss of treasured possessions. Kamptner (1989) states that meanings of personal possessions in late adulthood embody psychosocial challenges that relate to perceived control and mastery over aspects of the environment; possessions communicate what is important in the lives of older people.

The loss of treasured possessions was central to all pensioner stories. Research on late adulthood suggests that treasured personal objects provide individuals with symbolic meanings connected to providing a sense of identity (Kroger & Adair, 2008). The role of treasured possessions in an older person's life can provide a connection with the past, while also providing a sense of continuity throughout the lifespan through the meanings objects hold for the owner (Tobin, 1996). Kroger et al. (2008) state that "during late adulthood, loss of spouse, friends, a social context, abilities and a life era may give cherished personal objects a special role in helping to signify and anchor an individual's sense of personal identity" (p.6). Treasured possessions have a transferability about them; their meanings remain even if the place where one lives changes because there is the continuity of memories and connections (Shenk, Kuwahara & Zablotsky, 2004). These objects are physical reminders of the person "and how he or she is connected across time and place to present, past and future generations" (Kroger et al. 2008, p.23). Such meanings may not be obvious to others, but for the owner, the treasured possessions give a sense of pleasure, attachment or wellbeing and can provide a sense self-identity for older people (Kroger et al. 2008).

The objects that the pensioners lost in the flood included photographs and photo albums. The two male participants specifically talked about the loss of important certificates and records associated with their careers. The women talked about loss of possessions in relation to connections with the home and family. Other items included books and treasured furniture. All items, which each person talked about, were a representation of personal history and were connected with personal identity.

Mr W returned to his flat after the flood to find his treasured chairs belonging to his mother, had been contaminated by the floodwaters and that he was expected to throw them away:

“The only thing I really lost was the fridges and the washing machine and the microwave and the electrical stuff that was down low. I lost all those, but that can be replaced, but these are my old mother’s seats and there was no way I was going to let them go. Like you lost your bed, you couldn’t use your bed again, ‘cos it was under water, but like these [chairs], no, there was no way I was going to throw them away ... so I cleaned them up ... and hid them at my mate’s place”.

“The thing that really hurt me the most was losing your personal papers and your photo albums and things like that. That was the hardest part when you sat down there and looked at the things that you had had for fifty years and all that was gone, all gone ... it’s the things that you had, like I had a lot of books that I lost, but that’s why I put them up high now, just in case it does flood again”.

I asked whether there are some things that are replaceable in a flood and some that are irreplaceable:

“Yes, your family stuff once you’ve lost that, that’s gone forever, all my photographs and stuff and all the years I was in the Navy, they were all stuck together and I had to throw them out. [I say: And going through and finding that would have been hard.] Oh yes, that’s what you will find is the hardest thing for all the people here is not losing electrical stuff because you can always replace that, it’s the personal items that they have lost, you know, shoes, shoes that were caked with mud and you didn’t know what had been in there so you, so you had to throw them out”.

Mr T

In the previous section on ‘coping alone’ I asked Mr T what he had time to take with him, and he talked about taking an emergency bag with him. Mr T also went on to talk about loss of important papers that linked to his identity as a bowler (a central biographical theme for him).

“I lost all my coaching stuff and all that from bowls, all my certificates, I lost them all but I haven’t reapplied for them again, no I lost it all ... I sat my exams and all that to get my certificates for bowls”.

Mrs K

Mrs K talked about being in a bad state after the flood, and I asked her what she meant by this statement. She talked about the loss of possessions, particularly her large collection of wool and the meaning it had for her:

“And then they [emergency personnel] said to me that the water’s gone through the house, flooded everything, so that didn’t improve my humour, I can tell you ... I think it was just the shock [referring to being in a bad state] and then everything lost, the only thing they really saved was my TV because it was up high and the video, they were sort of up high luckily, but I lost everything [below 1 metre], bedding, everything, all my wool, my knitting, all my clothes it was devastating”.

A valued personal item was also talked about which highlights the importance of family heirlooms and the custodial nature of certain treasured possessions that function to maintain family history:

“But I will tell you what, my [late] husband was a genealogist, and he had a thick family tree book printed for him and he thought he would die before he finished it ... and when we went in [after the floodwaters had gone] it was sitting on the table and when I saw [the family tree book] my heart sort of ooh I never lost his family tree, so now it’s sitting in the top shelf in the wardrobe ... because somebody in the family will need it when they get older”.

I comment that treasured possessions are very important, Mrs K replies by talking about all her knitting, which she lost in the flood. Her knitting had significant meaning, which Mrs K said was a central part of her life. Her sense of identity is linked to the loss of her big collection of wool, her wool represented who she was and is.

“Yes, true, you can replace everything else. You can even replace the wool, but I had oodles of wool, you know, I had big 400-gram balls, and all my patterns, that’s my life, knitting is my life. [I] lost a lot of patterns, I had a plastic container with drawers in, the girls [her grand daughters] rescued the two top ones but my main ones were all down the bottom and they all went”.

Mrs C

Mrs C saved her photographs that had been in the floodwaters when she returned to her flat the next day. She (like Mr W) ignored the instructions of the clean up personnel to leave flood-damaged items and throw them in the disposal containers because of the possibility of sewage contamination:

“I saved all my photographs, I had a glory box and when they came to take all my stuff out that I was keeping, my son-in-law picked up the glory box and put it on his truck and the water was still running out of it, and somebody said you can’t take that away, he said, well I am. And we took it out to my daughter’s place and we went through all the photo albums and put all the photos out and dried every one of them”.

Personal belongings are an important part of an older person’s life. The pensioners not only had to cope with being separated from all their belongings they also faced dealing with the permanent loss of important possessions associated with identity. They also had to face changes in living arrangements and relocation from familiar surroundings for six months. These losses involve more than the loss of tangible things, “they involve loss of part of the fabric of one’s life and one’s self ... woven over the course of an entire lifetime” (Kamptner, 1989, p. 193).

Rest home residents’ narratives

Ageing and dependency

The rest home participants’ narratives reflected their personal age related needs, which were recognised in the context of the flood through the high levels of assistance and

social support they received during the emergency. Their stories expressed care, protection and trust that were storied in their experiences of the flood. These themes reflected meanings about personal and social vulnerability in the context of the disaster but also were expressions of broader socio-cultural narratives about ageing and dependency:

Mr G

“When I was 66 my wife died, and I lived alone until about six years ago and I couldn’t hack it any more it was too lonely and I spoke to the rest home manager ... well since I came here, the loneliness disappeared ... so when you are old there’s a lot of people don’t want much to do with you, and I’ve been happy here ever since”.

Later in the interview, Mr G again talks about dependency and ageing:

“I’ll tell you this, Robyn [research interviewer], after my wife died and I started doing it on my own, and as your health goes down and people avoid you and people who knew who I was, but they’d say ‘good day’ and that was the finish, and I knew the rest home existed and I thought there was something better in life than this, you know, there is nothing here, this isn’t home and the loneliness will kill you in the finish. And what struck me when I came here the number of nurses that go and say good day to you and the loneliness disappeared overnight ... And my sons came down and they wanted to take me home because I think they thought the rest home was a home for dead ends, and my daughter was all right, because she was working and would have had to have helped me and I thought that was selfish”.

Mrs G

Mrs G was a new arrival at the rest home and expressed confidence in the rest home staff in the context of ageing and dependency while also expressing perceptions around the challenges to caring for older people:

“They’ve always been very good here, lovely people. It must be difficult trying to get people to work in these places, ‘cos it’s not easy looking after old people”.

In relation to the evacuation Mrs G also situated her need for personal assistance within the context of ageing and personal vulnerability (both physical and emotional):

“It [the evacuation] was for our safety, and if it hadn’t gone well it would have been hard to get old people into safety, because none of us walk well or move fast so it must have been a worry for them too, a big worry”.

“Yes, well I think we were all in a bit of a shock [after the flood] it doesn’t take much when you are old”.

Both the physical and cognitive vulnerabilities of frail old people living in the rest home was also recognized by Mr J:

Mr J

“There would have been, sure to have been drownings, ‘cos some of them, especially in the home [high needs unit], they couldn’t have evacuated. Some of them they can’t walk and can’t even probably think for themselves. There would have been a lot of confusion”.

I ask if he talks to anyone about another flood if it has been raining heavily:

“If it keeps raining and raining, you do get a bit worried ... [about another flood occurring]. Well a lot of your mates here you can’t talk to, I’m sorry to say, they are not very rational, they don’t realize what’s going on, a lot of them ... I just think about it to myself, I talk to the ones that you know that are all right ... and generally speaking just hope that the flood banks will hold”.

Care and protection

The orderliness of the evacuation and the continuity of care helped to provide the rest home residents with a sense of protection and ongoing care. The protection they received affirmed their identity as a vulnerable older group needing a high level of assistance from others as was expressed in the following:

Mr G

“It was common knowledge that there were floods on the way. But I didn’t know we were to be evacuated to be honest, I didn’t, until a nurse came in and took my jacket out of the wardrobe and said you may have to use this. There were certainly people everywhere, because I was talking to one of these firemen from up north and there was about a dozen of them arrived, and everything went like military style, no trouble ... I wasn’t the slightest bit worried ... That’s what struck me, the way they were organized, and they had people like me and people who had strokes [who were evacuated to the local hospital] and it seemed everything went like clockwork, and nurses everywhere and help available, there was no panic ... There was not a bit of trouble and there was ample firemen everywhere and I can remember some of these old people they were lifting them onto the bus”.

Miss J

Miss J was evacuated to the school, which became the welfare evacuation centre, I asked: did she find the flood and evacuation distressing:

“I didn’t find it distressing, I just asked for my medication ... everything was taken care of”.

Mrs G

Mrs G was also evacuated to the school. She also expressed a sense of protection and care:

“All our own people were here [referring to rest home staff caring for them at the welfare evacuation centre], we were sort of in our own wings

and kept together, we had our breakfast together and our medicines were there for the morning”.

“The evacuation was all right, there was no panic or anything really ... everybody was wonderful, the Salvation Army was in and I believe the local people brought all sorts of food and things in for us ... so it wasn’t too bad at all for us ... The Salvation Army stayed with us, they were there all night ... they helped with us and especially the ones that can’t move around too much, they were there working ... I have nothing but praise for the whole lot, and if it happens again I’d say we don’t have to worry too much as I trust them”.

Continuity of rest home care was also maintained during the night of the evacuation. Mrs G expressed the importance she attached to the presence of rest home staff who were present at the welfare centre to help look after the residents:

“It’s like your parents coming in you know, you didn’t have to worry”

“Nothing was missed for our comfort ... especially [as] most of the old people are a bit confused and that didn’t help, poor souls, a lot can’t move and they took all the ones from the hospital wing up to the hospital, so they were all right ... But it is amazing what can be done when you see some of them and they can’t move. How they managed everything I don’t know ... They brought all our own things that we needed with us so that was good, its not like we were on strange beds or anything, we had our own stuff around us”.

“Everybody was concerned for our safety ... and knowing you could rely on them. We weren’t on our own they did everything that was right for us”.

Mr J

Mr J was evacuated to the school and like Mrs G he appreciated being kept together with all the rest home residents:

“They didn’t divide us up so we were among strangers”.

After his return to the rest home Mr J evaluated the flood:

“We all thought we were very lucky when we got back into our usual routine again. The girls were wonderful I’ve got that to say for them, they were absolutely marvellous. They looked after the old people, cuddled them and saw them onto the buses with blankets and so forth, they were wonderful. They are wonderful girls here they really are”.

Mr G

Mr G was evacuated to the hospital and was also looked after by rest home nurses:

“They were our own nurses who were caring to see what your needs were”.

Trust

Trust in the emergency personnel in charge of the decision-making and evacuation was important for all the rest home residents as the following excerpts show:

Mr G

“I feel quite confident in those people who make those decisions [evacuation decisions] and nothing will happen to us. And we are talking about those [the local emergency personnel, such as police and fire brigade which he identifies] who know what they are talking about too. Some of these chaps have lived here all their lives, and if some of them were strangers well anything can happen ... I’m sure if another flood occurred they would be onto it, and I have great respect for these chaps who make these decisions and they impressed me as being very able men that I respect”.

“Well, I haven’t been through a flood like that in all my life, but as I say everyone was concerned for our safety and that was the main thing...knowing that you could rely on them, we weren’t on our own”.

Mrs G

“It’s good to know that you can trust those who are caring for you, even the girls came back from their homes and came and stayed with us the night and they looked after us too”.

Mr J

Trust in those who made the decision to evacuate is expressed in the following answer to my question as to whether he was surprised to be evacuated:

“A little bit surprised, though I took it in my stride as much to say well if they think its evacuation, it’s evacuation, because they could see the flood outside more than I could see it from my room. I only knew there was water out there”.

The themes of care, protection, and trust can also be linked to factors relating to dependency and personal vulnerability. Vulnerability for the rest home residents can also be conceptualised as an interaction between personal and social vulnerability: the rest home residents had high personal vulnerability and low social vulnerability, and this ensured a good outcome for the residents. The rest home residents experienced a safe environment throughout the emergency, which ensured their personal care and protection needs were met. The assistance they received reduced their personal vulnerability to the disaster. At the interpersonal and social level they were recognised as a vulnerable group by the rest home and emergency management personnel, which ensured their safety. Their location in a rest home reduced their social vulnerability because they had high levels of institutional social connectedness, which ensured that they were a highly visible group in need of care and protection in a disaster.

Social support and community

Social support is well recognized in social science literature as playing an important role in health and well-being. Lyons and Chamberlain (2006) outline research that

demonstrates the positive association between social support and health and wellbeing, which in turn has been linked to lower mortality. Social support relates to the social integration and quality of social relationships. This includes family, friends, neighbours and communities that can help people deal with stressful events. Stroebe (2000) has described four types of functional social support that are available in times of need: emotional support, which functions to provide a sense of caring, comfort, empathy and belonging; practical support, which relates to provision of assistance in the form of tangible help or resources such as money or food; informational support, which relates to receiving advice and directions; and appraisal support, which relates to receiving of information that helps to appraise an event or situation, or to learning what resources are available to assist to cope with the situation. Social support is salient when thinking about vulnerability of older adults who experience a disaster. The buffering hypothesis suggests that social support acts to minimise the perceived stress through the provision of functional social support that is “linked to the specific coping needs elicited by a stressful event” (Stroebe, 2000, p. 251). In the context of the Kaitaia flood, the role of social support was an important part of each participant’s narrative.

Rest home residents’ social support

The most identifiable vulnerable group at risk of harm in the disaster were the rest home residents. They appropriately received a high level of evacuation support from rest home staff and emergency personnel. They were assisted to safety overnight and stayed either at the emergency welfare centre or the local hospital depending on the level of care they required. The residents were given emotional support through care and concern for their welfare by others, and continuity of nursing care during the night of the evacuation. Post-flood support was provided by the rest home staff, which helped to minimise the disruption by ensuring familiar rest home routines were resumed upon the residents’ return the next day. The following excerpts give an understanding of the social support experienced by rest home residents during the flood:

Miss K

“We were all safe and looked after ... everything was taken care of”.

Mr G

“I asked one of the nurses what was going on and she explained it all to me [the evacuation]”.

“To be quite honest, I wasn’t the slightest bit worried...you know how capable the staff were ... it was quite pleasant for me, it was quite a change to spend the day up at the hospital with nothing wrong with you”.

Mr J

“All the girls [rest home staff] were marvellous ... they made a cup of tea and biscuits whatever we liked ... they are wonderful girls here”.

Mrs G

“Everybody was so wonderful ... they were all caring people making sure we were all OK ... there was nothing missed for our comfort”.

The rest home participants were a frail, dependent group and had high personal vulnerability in a disaster. However, as discussed, they received a high level of social support, through the practical support available on the night. This support was from the rest home staff and emergency personnel who assisted the residents to evacuate to emergency accommodation, either at the school or to the hospital. Emotional support, appraisal support and informational support were all mentioned in the stories the participants told. Throughout their narratives the rest home residents used language that encompassed a sense of caring, being looked after, being given information about the flood, and advice about what was happening. None of the participants experienced levels of anxiety that made them appraise the flood as a stressful event. This suggests that the experience of the flood disaster did not exceed the coping abilities of the rest home participants, and that the appraisal of the disaster was mitigated through individual agency and the high level of social support that assisted this personally vulnerable group. Social vulnerability for the rest home participants can be theorised as being low because of their identity by nature of place and space, and high social connectedness made them easily identifiable as needing assistance in a disaster. In the context of disaster assistance, both place and space, in the context of social networks and relationships, functioned to create identities of frailty and dependence. These

relationships functioned to maintain the rest home participants' visibility within the community and ensure their safe evacuation.

Pensioners' social support

Social support for the pensioners occurred after their arrival at the welfare centre. Community welfare organisations, friends and family provided relocation assistance. Social support during the recovery phase of the flood disaster was an important part of the pensioner's narratives as the following excerpts reveal:

Mr W

“But we were lucky here really, because the “Sallies” [Salvation Army] went out of their way for us, and they got us a grant, which most people took, so you bought back your fridges and washing machines and that. They did a wonderful job, the old Salvation Army ... and WINZ [Work and Income New Zealand] helped too, they gave us a food voucher”.

Mr T

Mr T talked about the monthly dinners he attended for the flood victims:

“Oh it was marvellous ... they come and pick you up and bring you home again”.

For Mr T it was a chance to meet up with a lot of people that he knew:

“The lady that ran it for us ... she brought in different people who were talking, but I was lucky when I went down, I knew probably half of them, I had something to do with them and it was easy for me”.

I asked Mr T if there is any particular moment that stood out about the flood. Mr T talked about the problem he had had with submitting his flood insurance claim. He was given help by a social support worker to deal with his claim as the following excerpt shows:

“[The support worker] came to me and we were having a bit of trouble with insurance ... so I gave it all to her and she went away, she probably stood on her head to get things done, but she got it done”.

The practical social support described above provided advocacy assistance to help Mr T deal with his insurance claim. His recall of this event as an important moment, which stood out, highlights the importance of maintaining social support assistance that extends beyond the immediate time frame of a disaster. Importantly, that social support is needed for an extended period particularly when caring for an older population in the post-flood recovery phase when they are coping with a multiple number of challenging events. Such events included: loss of familiar home environment, loss of familiar neighbours and networks, loss of possessions, the logistic challenges such as making an insurance claim, and notifying change of address. Disaster assistance can encounter a diverse range of social support needs that victims might require not only in dealing with life event stressors associated with relocation and loss, but also with more routine stressors such as administrative/bureaucratic tasks associated with daily life. The perceived availability of social support has been reliably associated with mediating appraisal and coping processes; that having supportive others to rely on suggests that it is “less likely that they will cope ineffectively and thus have a negative psychological or health outcome” (DeLongis, Folkman, Lazarus, 1988, p. 487).

Mrs K

Mrs K talked about the importance of the Salvation Army, her neighbours and her friends who supported her after the flood event. She also talked about what could be categorized as a ‘daily hassle’ stressor in response to me asking her was the most challenging part of the flood:

“They [Salvation Army] have been marvellous and the people around, a lot of my friends have been good they’ve been good. The only part that wasn’t good was the power board, we just got new metres in October and I got a bill for \$500 the other day and so one of my friends came in and she got on the phone ... So whether it will right itself out or not, I don’t know, but that is the only bad thing I have had since the flood is my power bill”.

In terms of ongoing support after the flood, a friend assisted Mrs K by salvaging some of her wool and a box of knitting needles, (knitting was expressed as being a very important part of her life). Mrs K also had assistance from family to settle into her new flat:

“And a lot of people I didn’t know, now have become my friends ... and some of them are here [in neighbouring flats] most of in here are flood victims and we have all got to know each other ... we all have the same thing in common, but none of us talk about it, oh I do a grizzle now and again because I can’t find a [knitting] pattern”.

Mrs K has also experienced the tangible effects of practical social support in terms of having her flood damaged wool collection replaced by people giving her wool:

“And everybody’s been coming and every time someone comes, there’s a bag of wool or some patterns, they all knew I was a knitter, so I think I have a bit more than what I had before”.

Community support was also ongoing for Mrs K:

“Most of them [flood victims] live here and then some of them became my friends and we had a group at the Salvation Army called ‘Do drop in’ and we met there ... we’ve become good friends”.

Social support from within the flooded pensioner community has increased and become stronger as the social networks among the pensioners are actively maintained since their return to the refurbished flats:

Mr W

“We all get along well together, we all go out for dinner once a month. Tonight we go for dinner, every month we all go for dinner.”

I asked whether the dinners are something that was started since the flood:

“Yeah, since the flood, when the whole place filled up, that’s when we started and then every time it’s someone’s birthday we have a party at their place, and you get the old eighty year olds sitting over there chirping away”.

I asked about why the regular social dinner event began:

“Well we all just decided that we were looking into each others windows and that we might as well go out and have dinner, go to the concerts and that”.

Mrs C

Mrs C described the social support she received at the evacuation centre where she spent the night:

“There was everybody that was flooded out was taken up there, and even the people from [the rest home] were up there, but they sort of kept us all separated. There was food, you could eat what you wanted when you wanted ... we were so hyped up you couldn’t sleep, I think we got a few hours sleep eventually ... the council must have got in touch with people that were arranging accommodation around here because they said I’d be going out to [stay with a family member]”.

Social support within the pensioner community appears to have been a major reason for Mrs C’s return to the same area, as was the knowledge that there had been an improvement to the flood protection stop-bank near the pensioner flats. She assesses her pensioner environment in the following excerpt:

“It’s a good ‘possie’ [situation] here, it’s nice and handy to everything ... [I mention that there is also the pensioner community Mrs C replies:] There’s a group of people going out for tea tonight, we’re all going to the RSA [Returned Services Association], we do it once a month, we go down to have tea at the RSA on a Wednesday night”.

The social dinner outings were started once the pensioners returned to their flats after they had been refurbished. Many of the pensioners received material and financial help through the Salvation Army and a flood relief fund that was set up:

“They supplied us with all the necessities of starting up a home again, there was the bed, the fridge, the washing machine, heater, I think you could have a TV, a sofa, and if you needed pots and pans, cutlery, crockery, anything like that you could have it”.

Mrs C was one of the pensioners who did not have insurance at the time of the flood, but since the flood she now has insured her belongings.

Social support during and after a disaster can however be problematic. Tyler (2006) states that a unique aspect of disasters is that entire support networks might be impacted and that persons who are usually sources of support for others may themselves be in need of support. The pensioner flats were a community grouped together, and as an older community located together, it meant that they were more at risk of not coping in a disaster. They had fewer neighbours capable to assist them or alert them to a possible flood. Mr W, however, played an active role in checking on other residents and assisting the fire brigade to gain entrance to his ninety-year-old neighbour’s flat:

Mr W

“Well the old lady next to me I helped, and old Mr F, I helped ... well I was more worried about the old lady ‘cos she had dementia, next door to me, but she was OK and old Mr F when they (fire brigade) came back to me and said to me when I was grabbing bags of stuff, does anybody live there and I said you’ve got to go around [to] the back door to get into his place. So we went around the back and I showed them how to get in there”.

Mrs B

Mrs B’s expressions of social support were primarily about the insurance cover she had; her immediate accommodation was in a motel and then a temporary flat which

insurance contributed to paying. She attended the flood victims' dinners once a month, which presented challenges for her:

“They were going to have one [flood victims dinner], then they decided to have another one and then apparently the people all wanted to continue them until they moved back in so they had 3 or 4 or 5 or something like that and I went down because I thought it would be the right thing to do, otherwise you look like you're too good for them or something, so I thought I had better go”.

Mrs B's ambivalence towards this form of social support shows that social support after a disaster can be problematic for some. All the pensioners talked about the importance of social support they received both from formal and informal networks after the disaster, which assisted them in dealing with the disruption to their lives. For most of the pensioners the social support increased their social networks; there were regular monthly social support flood dinners which continued for a year post-flood; a regular drop-in group was set up for the flood victims by the Salvation Army; and a social group was set up by the pensioners. The effects of social support after the flood appear to have strengthened and increased the pensioners' social connectedness in relation to their neighbourhood social networks, and friendships. Welfare agencies also became involved in assisting the pensioners financially and emotionally after the flood.

Social support is an indicator of social connectedness, and lack of support can create social vulnerability in a disaster. None of the pensioners were aware that the rain, which had been falling in the region, was a threat to them. No one had had contacted them and as a consequence they were unprepared for the disaster, which indicated that they also had reduced informational social support. Furthermore, three out of five of the pensioners evacuated with limited practical assistance. The limited social support assistance they received, highlighted their vulnerability in terms of the reduced practical resources such as the availability of others, who could have helped them evacuate. This is consistent with research by Tyler (2006) who conducted research on levels of social support for older adults, and found older people may experience both physical and cognitive health limitations, as well as reduced levels of social support due to deaths of

family, friends and other social support members whom they can rely on in times of need.

Summary

The narratives of the pensioner participants differed from those of the rest home participants in a number of ways. The rest home participants storied their experiences around dependence and personal vulnerability, and the high levels of social support they received. The pensioners generally storied their experiences around independence in relation to how they coped during the disaster and placed less emphasis on social support. Despite the intentions of the 'positive ageing' policy, the normative social expectation of independence may place older people in a more socially vulnerable situation when they are exposed to a disaster event. The social connectedness of the pensioner group to the wider community appears to have been reduced. None of the pensioners had been contacted over concerns about potential flooding, despite living next to a flood protection stop bank. Neither did they consider the possibility that there may be a flood. Despite older adults' ability to remain independent and cope in everyday situations, an emergency may push them over their threshold of capability. A disaster may compromise and adversely affect their decision-making skills. Furthermore, a disaster may reduce the level of assistance they would ordinarily be able to give and expect to receive from others in the neighbourhood in a non-disaster situation. Research on social networks and older adults by Antonucci and Akiyama (1987), found that the provision of support generally declined with age, that the oldest group (75 years to 95 years) reported providing and receiving support from fewer people. All the pensioners lived alone and some had problems with their health, which combined to increase their personal vulnerability. Only one pensioner mentioned giving assistance to neighbours. The lack of social networks to communicate awareness of the flood threat and alert them to being prepared for a possible evacuation meant they became socially vulnerable.

This research project has used the participants' narratives to develop a theoretical relationship linking factors associated with vulnerability in a disaster. The pensioners had low to moderate personal vulnerability (independent in the community, with some health related problems and mobility difficulties) but had higher social vulnerability reflected in the disaster context by their unawareness to the threat of heavy rain,

(decreased social connectedness), their location next to a flood protection stop bank, and the normative cultural expectations around independence and self-reliance. In a disaster context the pensioners had become socially vulnerable. This personal-social vulnerability relationship in the everyday context did not appear problematic for the pensioners, until the disruptive flood event occurred. In comparison, the rest home residents had high personal vulnerability (physical and cognitive decline) but had low social vulnerability (social connectedness in the rest home environment), and were recognised as a vulnerable group in need of assistance. The rest home residents were less vulnerable in the flood, because their needs were assessed and resources were provided to reduce adverse outcomes.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The concept of a disaster in this thesis was identified as a social phenomenon because the human experience of a disaster occurs within the existing social conditions. The research project was based on nine narrative interviews to gather the experiences of older adults who had been evacuated in the Kaitaia flood disaster, and thematic analysis was used to gain understandings and meanings of the disaster in their lives. The participants recalled past life experiences that were biographically linked to the flood disaster. All the themes were influenced by the participants' location as either pensioners living independently in the community or dependently as rest home residents. The personal experiences that the pensioners talked about included overcoming a phobia, remaining smoke-free, dealing with stress in the navy, and caring for others. The pensioners expressed meanings about their identity, which related to being independent and agentic. The rest home residents recalled past experiences of challenging events, such as the war and previous flooding, which they biographically linked to the 2007 flood disaster. The residents also expressed meanings about identity in relation to being dependent older adults who required high levels of assistance at this stage in their lives.

The analysis examined older adults' experiences the flood in the context of ageing and explored how the narratives were expressions of personal and social vulnerability. Separate narrative themes emerged from the pensioner group, and the rest home resident group. The first narrative theme specific to the pensioners was 'Coping with limited assistance'. The pensioners expressed a sense of panic and personal vulnerability as the floodwaters entered their homes while they were evacuating. They were unaware of the rising floodwaters, and despite their location next to a flood protection stop-bank had received no early warning of a possible flood. The second theme, 'Loss of treasured possessions', discussed the emotional challenge that all the pensioners faced because of their loss of possessions and treasured items. Treasured possessions have symbolic meanings in older adulthood, which can help maintain a sense of identity. Loss of important possessions may impact on recovery and well-being after a disaster. Narrative themes specific to the rest home residents reflected the residents' age related

personal and social vulnerability. The need for care and protection in the context of old age was a common theme for the residents. All the residents expressed their identity as frail dependent adults who needed to be cared for. The high level of assistance that they received played an important role in helping them feel safe and well looked after. The residents also talked about the importance of trusting the rest home staff and emergency personnel to care for them in this emergency.

Social support was identified as a common narrative theme for both groups. The role of social support cannot be underestimated. The rest home residents received high levels of social support, as expressed in the themes of dependency, care, protection and trust. Their experiences of the flood disaster suggest that their appraisal of the event was mitigated through individual agency and the high level of social support they received. Their personal vulnerability was addressed, and appropriate assistance was given to keep them safe. The social support given to the rest home residents was an indicator of their social connectedness within the community. Their social conditions relating to place and space functioned to create social networks, which decreased their social vulnerability to the flood disaster. The rest home residents' social vulnerability was reduced because they were identified in the community as needing assistance and care from others. Conceptually, the rest home was a symbolic conduit that connected relationships between identity, ageing and place, which ensured that the rest home residents were visible as a highly vulnerable population.

Social support for the pensioners was problematic both prior to and during the evacuation and revealed their social vulnerability in a disaster. Their geographic location in pensioner flats made them less visible, as evidenced by the lack of information provided to them, and the late warning about possible flooding. Some pensioners evacuated with limited help from others, and this increased personal vulnerability to the flood; for example, one woman negotiated the floodwaters alone and in the dark. However, the social support in the post disaster phase was an important and positive aspect in each person's story. Post disaster support included material, emotional, practical, and appraisal support from welfare organisations, friends and family. The pensioners' post-flood social networks were also strengthened and increased. The pensioners started a monthly pensioner social dinner outing after returning to their refurbished flats. The duration of the social support is also relevant;

the flood victims' dinners continued for a year, and all the pensioners were still in contact with the people who assisted them in their recovery phase. A theoretical argument in relation to factors associated with vulnerability in a disaster has been conceptualised. The pensioners had low to moderate personal vulnerability but higher social vulnerability. The personal-social vulnerability relationship in the everyday context was not problematic for the pensioners, until the disruptive flood event occurred. In comparison, the rest home residents had high personal vulnerability with low social vulnerability. Their personal-social vulnerability relationship was acknowledged and addressed in the disaster context.

The narratives expressed social processes within the research context and also the broader socio-cultural setting. In the context of the research project, meanings of the flood were expressed in the social interaction that was specific between each participant and myself. The narratives therefore were told within an interpersonal context and detail was given to situate the researcher in each participant's story. The participants also expressed social narratives that were influenced by place and social space. The rest home participants constructed their identity as dependent older adults who could no longer live independently. The pensioner participants constructed their identity as independent older adults living and interacting within the wider community. Embedded within the personal narratives of both groups were socio-cultural norms around ageing, particularly the performative assumptions relating to dependence and independence in old age. Their experiences of the flood were personal narratives as well as being social and cultural narratives in the context of the flood disaster.

Implications for practice and research

At the broader socio-cultural level, the first implication for practice arises from the finding that independent older adults are at risk of becoming socially vulnerable in disaster. Disaster experts and researchers need to be aware of social processes, particularly lowered levels of social connectedness that contribute to poor disaster outcomes. Older adults in the community who may be at risk of becoming socially vulnerable in a disaster need to be identified prior to the event. In particular those living in geographic areas that are more likely to be adversely affected need to be identified and involved in emergency preparedness planning. Further research is needed to develop an assessment tool that would measure the vulnerability of older adults living

independently in the community. One possibility could involve the development of a database of older adults who are currently receiving health and welfare support in the community. The database could also be used in delivering disaster education and prevention strategies for reducing personal and social vulnerability. These resources would also assist emergency welfare personnel to quickly identify and alert older adults to a disaster.

The impact on psychosocial wellbeing arising from the loss of treasured possessions, symbolic of personal history and identity was the second important finding with an implication for practice. The pensioners' losses could have been mitigated to some degree if personal and significant items had been identified and stored safely. The implications for practice are strengthening the role of emergency education and improving preparation to ensure older adults could locate and make safe items that are of personal value; items that to each person are irreplaceable.

The third implication for practice relates to best practice guidelines for the restoration of flood-damaged items that have special significance to older adults. Flood damaged items will require decontamination if the floodwaters contain sewerage. Decontamination is an option for many items such as furniture, clothing, photographs, paper, books, disks and tapes, (Australian Red Cross, n.d.). If decontamination procedures are not put in place, many treasured items will be disposed of unnecessarily. The role and significance of treasured possessions in old age is relatively under-researched in the literature. Further research needs to be undertaken into whether the rescue of treasured possessions from a disaster can facilitate positive relocation adjustments post disaster.

My research showed that the need for social support extended beyond immediate recovery from the disaster event. For some pensioners, difficulties such as incorrect power bills and insurance claims required ongoing advocacy and support. The final implication for practice identified from this research is that social support and recovery assistance following a disaster requires a long-term commitment from agencies to promote recovery and wellbeing for older adults. Meeting these ongoing needs is a crucial aspect of post disaster recovery, and made a significant contribution the pensioners' wellbeing. However providing ongoing social support can test the

resources of voluntary social agencies. These agencies should not have to shoulder the burden of providing ongoing social support to victims during the extended phase of disaster psychosocial recovery. Further research needs to examine how voluntary and state funded community welfare and emergency agencies can best coordinate their provision of social support to older adults, in order to identify and meet their ongoing needs.

In this study, participants made sense of the disaster by linking the disruptive disaster to personal experiences. Past personal events and experiences were important factors in how each person dealt with the challenge of the flood and appear to have been an adaptive coping strategy. The disaster was not a separate event but became biographically integrated with each person's life story, which appeared to enable each person to make sense of the disaster in a way that was adaptive for his or her recovery. Further research is needed to understand what factors facilitate older adults experiencing and interpreting disasters in an adaptive way.

The strength of this research project is that it reflects the dynamic and reflexive nature of case centred narrative research. The narratives were a product of the collaboration between the teller and the listener, as without the two partners there can be no story. The data is rich in detail encompassing personal, social and cultural narratives. Methodologically, the use of narrative interviews enabled expressions about identity and self, and socio-cultural influences, to be storied. This project has contributed to extending disaster research and practice in relation to older adults by exploring shared understandings and meanings about a disaster experience. The narrative research based on the Kaitaia flood disaster supports the literature that conceptualises disasters as social phenomena, which reflect and highlight both personal and social vulnerability within communities.

References

- Antonucci, T. C., Akiyama, H. (1987). Social Networks in adult life and a preliminary examination of the convoy model. *Journal of Gerontology, 42*, 519-527.
- Australian Red Cross. (n.d.). *Relief in times of crisis*. Retrieved 20 May, 2009, from http://www.redcross.org.au/media/Cleaning_up_after_flooding_booklet.pdf
- Bankoff, G., Frerks, & Hilhorst, D. (2004). *Mapping vulnerability*. London: Earthscan.
- Bolin, R. (2006). Race, class, ethnicity, and disaster vulnerability. In H. Rodriguez, E. L. Quarantelli & R. R. Dynes (Eds.). *Handbook of disaster research*. New York: Springer Science.
- Bolin, R., & Klenow, D. J. (1988). Older people in disaster: a comparison of black and white victims. *International Journal of Aging and Human development, 26*, 29-43.
- Bourque, L. B., Siegel, J. M., Kano, M., & Wood, M. M. (2006). Morbidity and Mortality associated with disasters. In H. Rodriguez, E. L. Quarantelli & R. R. Dynes (Eds.). *Handbook of disaster research*. New York: Springer Science.
- Braun, V., Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*, 77-101.
- Bruner, J. (1991). The narrative construction of reality. *Critical Inquiry, 18*, 1-21.
- Cutter, S. L., Boruff, B. J., & Shirley, W. L. (2003). Social vulnerability to environmental hazards. *Social Science Quarterly, 84*, 242-261.
- Cutter, S. L., & Emrich, C. (2005). *Are natural hazards and disaster losses in the US increasing*. Retrieved 5 April, 2009, from http://www.uvm.edu/~pbierman/classes/gradsem/2005fall/Cutter_2005.pdf

- DeLongis, A., Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R. (1988). The impact of daily stress on health and mood: psychological and social resources as mediators. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *54*, 486-495.
- Enarson, E. (1999). Violence against women in disasters: a study of domestic violence programs in the United States and Canada. *Violence against Women*, *5*, 742-768.
- Enarson, E., Fothergill, A., & Peek, L. (2006). Gender and disaster. In H. Rodriguez, E. L. Quarantelli & R. R. Dynes (Eds.). *Handbook of disaster research*. New York: Springer Science.
- Faircloth, C. A., Boylstein, C., Rittman, M., Young, M. E., & Gubrium, J. (2004). Sudden illness and biographical flow in narratives of stroke recovery. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, *26*, 242-261.
- Featherstone, M., & Hepworth, M. (1991). The mask of ageing and the postmodern life course. In M. Featherstone, M. Hepworth & B. Turner (Eds.). *The body: social process and cultural theory*. London: Sage Publications.
- Ferraro, F. R. (2003). Psychological resilience in older adults following the 1997 flood. *Clinical Gerontologist*, *26*, 139-143.
- Furedi, F. (2007). The changing meaning of disaster. *Area*, *39*, 482-489.
- Fussell, E. (2006). Leaving New Orleans: social stratification, networks, and hurricane evacuation. Retrieved 10 March, 2008, from <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Fussell/>
- Giddens, A. (1979). *Central problems in social theory*. London: The Macmillan Press.
- Holstein, M.B., & Minkler, M. (2003). Self, society and the “new gerontology”. *The Gerontologist*, *43*, 787-796.

- Kamptner, L. N. (1989). Personal possessions and their meanings in old age. In S. Spacapan & S. Oskamp (Eds.). *The social psychology of ageing* (pp.165-196). Newbury Park: Sage.
- Kaniasty, K., & Norris, F. H. (1995). In search of altruistic community: patterns of social support mobilisation following Hurricane Katrina. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 23*, 447-477.
- Katz, S., & Marshall, B. (2003). New sex for old: lifestyle, consumerism, and the ethics of aging well. *Journal of Aging Studies, 17*, 3-16.
- Klinenberg, E. (2002). *Heat wave: a social autopsy of disaster in Chicago*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kroger, J., & Adair, V. (2008). Symbolic meanings of valued personal objects in identity transitions of late adulthood. *Identity, 8*, 5-24.
- Levy, B. R., & Meyers, L. M. (2004). Preventive health behaviours influenced by self-perceptions of aging. *Preventive Medicine, 39*, 625-629.
- Lindsay, J. (2009). *Social Vulnerability*. Paper presented at the Emergency management summer institute, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand.
- Lupton, D. (2006). *Risk*. New York: Routledge.
- Lyons, A., & Chamberlain, K. (2006). *Health Psychology: a critical introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mayhorn, C. B. (2005). Cognitive aging and the processing of hazard information and disaster warnings. *Natural Hazards Review, 165-170*.
- Ministry of Health. (2002). *Health of older people strategy*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Health.

- Mishler, E. G. (1986). *Research interviewing: context and narrative*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Murray, M. (2000). Levels of analysis in health psychology. *Journal of Health Psychology, 5*, 337-347.
- Murray, M. (2004). Narrative Psychology and Narrative Analysis. In P.M.Camic, J. E. Rhodes & L. Yardley (Eds.). *Qualitative Research in Psychology: expanding perspectives in methodology and design*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Perry, R. W. (2006). What is a disaster. In H. Rodriguez, E. L. Quarantelli & R. R. Dynes (Eds.). *Handbook of disaster research*. New York: Springer Science.
- Perry, R. W., & Lindell, M. K. (1997). Aged citizens in the warning phase of disasters: re-examining the evidence. *International Journal of Aging and Human development, 44*, 257-267.
- Phibbs, S. (2008). Four dimensions of narrativity: towards a narrative analysis of gender identity that is simultaneously personal, local and global. *New Zealand Sociology, 23*, 47-60.
- Phifer, J. F., & Norris, F. H. (1989). Psychological symptoms in older adults following disaster: nature, timing duration, and course. *Journal of Gerontology, 44*, S207-217.
- Polkinghorne, D. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Prince, M., & Davies, M. A. P. (2007). Natural Environment Disaster survival experiences: narrative research from two communities. *The Australasian Journal of Disaster and Trauma Studies, 2*. Retrieved 8 February, 2009, from <http://www.massey.ac.nz/~trauma/issues/2007-2/prince.htm>

- Quarantelli, E. L. (2006). A heuristic approach to future disasters and crises: new, old and in-between types. In H. Rodriguez, E. L. Quarantelli & R. R. Dynes (Eds.). *Handbook of disaster research*. New York: Springer Science.
- Riad, J. K., Norris, F. H., & Ruback, R. B. (1999). Predicting evacuation in two major disasters: risk perception, social influence, and access to resources. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 29*, 918-934.
- Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- Rodriguez, H., Quarantelli, E.L., & Dynes, R. R. (2006). *Handbook of disaster research*. New York: Springer Science.
- Shenk, D., Kuwahara, K., & Zablotzky, D. (2004). Older women's attachments to their home and possessions. *Journal of Aging studies, 18*, 157-169.
- Sorensen, J. H., & Sorensen, B. V. (2006). Community processes: warning and evacuation. In H. Rodriguez, E. L. Quarantelli & R. R. Dynes (Eds.). *Handbook of disaster research*. New York: Springer Science.
- Statistics New Zealand. (2007). *National population projections: 2006 (base) – 2061*. Retrieved 2 April, 2009, from <http://www.stats.govt.nz/NR/rdonlyres/152C242E-E6F8-4A7A-87C7-8C0A3E48D790/0/nationalpopulationprojections2006basehotp.pdf>
- Stroebe, W. (2000). *Social psychology and health*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Tamura, K., Hayashi, H., & Kimura, R. (2006). Clarifying the disaster process of the elderly in the aspect of social welfare. *Annals of Disaster Prevention Research Institute, Kyoto University, 49C*, 163 - 170.

- Tanida, N. (1996). What happened to elderly people in the great Hanshin earthquake. *British Medical Journal*, *313*, 1133-1135.
- Tobin, S. (1996). Cherished possessions: The meaning of things. *Generations*, *20*, 46-49.
- Tyler, K., & Hoyt, D. (2000). The effects of an acute stressor on depressive symptoms among older adults. *Research on Aging*, *22*, 143-164.
- Tyler, K. (2006). The impact of support received and support provision on changes in perceived social support among older adults. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, *62*, 21-38.
- Wiles, J. L., Allen, R. E. S., Palmer, A. J., Hayman, K. J., Keeling, S., & Kerse, N. (2009). Older people and their social spaces: a study of well-being and attachment to place in Aotearoa New Zealand. *Social Science and Medicine*, *68*, 664-671.
- Wiles, J. L., Rosenberg, M. W., & Kearns, R. A. (2005). Narrative analysis as a strategy for understanding interview talk in geographic research. *Area*, *37*, 89-99.

Appendices

Appendix 1A Information letter to pensioners

MASSEY LETTERHEAD

27 June 2008

Information letter

Hello, my name is Robyn Tuohy and I am a student at Massey University. My background before embarking on my Masters degree was in nursing, social work, together with raising a family. I am writing to ask if you would consider participating in a research study that would be part of my Master of Arts degree. I would like to do my research on the experiences of older Kaitaia residents who were evacuated during the Kaitaia floods last year.

I would like to talk with you about your experiences of the flood and evacuation. I will not have a long list of questions for you, but rather, would like to listen to your experiences of the flood event that relate to the day of the flood, the evacuation, and after the emergency was over. The questions would be asked in a general way such as “can you tell me about the flood ... can you tell me about the night you were evacuated”.

I live in Wellington and would travel up to Kaitaia to meet and with you. I would like to tape record the interview with your permission. The tape and any written material from your interview will be stored securely and your identity kept confidential. I would not be using your name in my research project. Any information you gave me that might make you identifiable would be omitted, as I am aware that where you were living could compromise your anonymity due to the small size of the Kaitaia community. If you would like the interview recording sent back I am happy to return it to you, otherwise the audio-taped recording will be stored securely at Massey University, Palmerston North, and would be destroyed after five years. You would also have the opportunity to read your transcribed interview and add comments or withdraw comments as you desire.

There is not a lot of published research about the needs of older people in a disaster such as a flood evacuation. By interviewing some of the Kaitaia residents affected by the Kaitaia floods, my research would contribute to informing emergency service and support agencies as to how best to assist older people in a disaster situation.

I have consulted with Work and Income management about my project, and a staff member from Kaitaia has agreed to pass this letter on to you. I would like to reassure you that whether you choose to participate or not participate in this research, it would not affect the support you are getting now or in the future from Work and Income. The interview would take about an hour and I would interview you in an environment that would ensure your privacy. The time of the interview would be arranged to suit your schedule, and I would be the only person interviewing you. I am happy for you to invite whanau/extended family as support for you during the interview. If you would like support people to be available to you in case talking about your experiences of the floods causes you discomfort, please let me know. Work and Income have also indicated that they are willing to provide a support person, should you want this. This support would be from the Salvation Army who worked closely with people affected by Kaitaia floods. There would be no financial cost to you to have this support.

If you have any further questions about the research project please feel free to contact me. The best way would be to let the Work and Income staff member who gave you this letter know that you have some further questions, she will contact me and I will ring you back. Once I have completed my research, a summary will be sent to you and I would also be willing to meet with all the participants and support people as a group to share my findings.

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation to be interviewed. However, if you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study (specify timeframe);
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;

- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview

My research is being supervised by two academic staff from Massey University:

Dr Christine Stephens
 School of Psychology
 Massey University
 Palmerston North
 Phone: 06 350 5799 ext. 2081
 E-mail: c.v.stephens@massey.ac.nz

Dr David Johnston
 Joint Centre for Disaster Research
 GNS Science/Massey University
 Lower Hutt.
 Phone: 04 570 1444
 E-mail: david.johnston@gns.cri.nz

If you agree to being interviewed about the July floods, please reply to the Invitation to Participate form that I have enclosed and return in the freepost (no stamp is needed) self-addressed envelope to me.

Could you also enclose your contact details on the form so that I can write or ring you to make an interview time that would be suitable.

Thank you for taking the time to read this research information letter.

Kind Regards,

Robyn Tuohy

School of Psychology

Massey University

Palmerston North



This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 08/23. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact:

Dr Karl Pajo

Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B

Massey University.

Palmerston North.

Telephone: 04 801 5799 x 6929.

Email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Appendix 1B *Information letter to rest home residents*

MASSEY LETTERHEAD

27 June 2008

Information letter

Hello, my name is Robyn Tuohy and I am a student at Massey University. My background before embarking on my Masters degree was in nursing, social work, together with raising a family. I am writing to ask if you would consider participating in a research study that would be part of my Master of Arts degree. I would like to do my research on the experiences of older Kaitaia residents who were evacuated during the Kaitaia floods last year.

I would like to talk with you about your experiences of the flood and evacuation. I will not have a long list of questions for you, but rather, would like to listen to your experiences of the flood event that relate to the day of the flood, the evacuation, and after the emergency was over. The questions would be asked in a general way such as “can you tell me about the flood ... can you tell me about the night you were evacuated”.

I live in Wellington and would travel up to Kaitaia to meet and with you. I would like to tape record the interview with your permission. The tape and any written material from your interview will be stored securely and your identity kept confidential. I would not be using your name in my research project. I would not identify the name of the rest home, but given that [rest home name deleted] was the only rest home in Kaitaia to be evacuated, complete anonymity is not certain. Because of this possibility, I would be careful about protecting your anonymity, and any information you gave me that might make you identifiable would be omitted. I have written to [rest home manager] who is aware of the possibility that anonymity of [the rest home] cannot be guaranteed.

If you would like the interview recording sent back, I would return it to you, otherwise the audio-taped recording will be stored securely at Massey University, Palmerston North, and would be destroyed after five years. You would also have the opportunity to

read your transcribed interview and add comments or withdraw comments as you desire.

Earlier in the year, I came up to Kaitaia and met with [name deleted] the General Manager of [name deleted] Rest Home and she agreed to pass this letter on to you. The interview would take about an hour and we would use a room at the rest home that would ensure your privacy. The time of the interview would be arranged to suit you. I would be the only person interviewing you, and am happy for you to invite whanau/extended family as support for you during the interview. I would also inform the rest home staff so that they were aware and supportive, if you asked me to.

There is not a lot of research about the needs of older people in a disaster such as a flood evacuation. My research would help inform emergency service and support agencies to assist older people in a disaster situation. Once I have completed my research, a summary of my findings will be sent to you and I would also be willing to meet with all the participants and support people as a group to share my findings. If you have any further questions about my research please feel free to contact me. The best way would be to let [name deleted] know you have some further questions, she will contact me and I will ring you back. You do not have to accept this to invitation to be interviewed.

However, if you decide to accept this invitation, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded
- ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview

My research is being supervised by two academic staff from Massey University:

Dr Christine Stephens
 School of Psychology
 Massey University
 Palmerston North
 Phone: 06 350 5799 ext. 2081
 E-mail: c.v.stephens@massey.ac.nz

Dr David Johnston
 Joint Centre for Disaster Research
 GNS Science/Massey University
 Lower Hutt.
 Phone: 04 570 1444
 E-mail: david.johnston@gns.cri.nz

If you agree to being interviewed about the July floods, please reply to the Invitation to Participate form and return in the freepost (no stamp is needed) self-addressed envelope that is enclosed. I would then ring you or liaise with [name deleted] to make a time to come and interview you.

Thank you for taking the time to read this research information letter.
 Kind Regards,

Robyn Tuohy
 School of Psychology
 Massey University
 Palmerston North



This project has been reviewed and approved by the
 Massey University Human Ethics Committee:
 Southern B Application 08/23.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact:

Dr Karl Pajo,
 Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B
 Massey University,
 Palmerston North.
 Telephone: 04 801 5799 x 6929.
 E-mail address: humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Appendix 2 Invitation to participate reply form

MASSEY LETTERHEAD

Older people's experiences of the Kaitaia Floods

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Please return this form in the pre-paid, addressed envelope provided

Your name:

Your postal address is:

.....
.....
.....

Your contact telephone number is

The best time of day to ring you is:

Please tick the box if you require tikanga maori within the interview process

27/6/2008

Appendix 3 *Participant consent form*

MASSEY LETTERHEAD

Older people's experiences of the Kaitaia Floods

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I wish/do not wish to have my tapes returned to me.

I wish/do not wish to have the opportunity to make changes to my transcript

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information letter.

Signature:

Date:

Full Name - printed

15 September 2008

Appendix 4 Letter to participants with summary of results

MASSEY LETTERHEAD

12 May 2009

Dear

This letter is to thank you very much for your interest and time that you gave me last September, and to let you know the results. The study I undertook was part of my Masters degree in Psychology and without your participation the study could not have happened.

What the study was about

The aim of the study was to speak to older adults who had experienced the Kaitaia flood disaster, and to listen to and record the stories about the flood from those who were affected. There is not a lot of research about how older people cope in a disaster.

What the study looked at

In this study, I used your stories about the flood to gain a broader understanding of how you responded to and recovered from the flood. I collected stories about the flood from two groups: a rest home group and a group living in pensioner flats.

What did I find?

Both groups talked about the flood as an event that was linked to other personal experiences. In this way the disaster was not a separate event but became part of each person's life story. Past personal events and experiences were important factors in how each person dealt with the challenge of the flood.

There were differences between the two groups' flood evacuation experiences. People from the rest home talked about the importance of the care and protection they experienced. They also recognised their need for a high level of help and described how reassuring this level of assistance was for them. They all trusted the rest home staff and emergency personnel to care for them in this emergency.

Those living in the pensioner flats had less help during the evacuation. Some had to leave their flats by themselves, and no one was able to keep important items safe. The unexpectedness of the flood meant that many treasured items were lost. This group of people valued the assistance received from welfare agencies, family and friends and this support was an important part of the recovery process after the flood.

Recommendations

In reflecting on this research a number of practical recommendations for action emerged.

- Older dependent adults need to be recognised by the community as needing a high level of assistance from the rest home staff and emergency personnel in a disaster.

- It is essential that independent older adults receive help and support for an extended period of time after a disaster.
- Early warning in the event of a possible hazard would ensure that older adults in the community have time to prepare for an evacuation.
- It is important that emergency services know where the more vulnerable older adults in the community are living, so that assistance can be offered in an emergency.
- Emergency education and preparation needs to make sure that older adults can locate and make safe items that are of personal value - items that to each person are irreplaceable.
- Attention needs to be paid to restoring flood-damaged items that are important to older adults. If decontamination procedures are not put in place, many special items will be lost because of flood contamination.

My research and findings have been presented and well received at the following meetings and conferences:

- An Emergency Management Conference, Wellington
- School of Psychology, Massey University, Palmerston North
- Ministry of Social Development, Wellington

In July 2009, I will present my research at the International Conference on Gerontology, in Paris, where a major conference topic is Disasters and Ageing.

Once again, many thanks for your assistance, your input into furthering knowledge in this area has been valuable.

Kind regards,

Robyn Tuohy

Appendix 5 Interview guidelines

Interview Guidelines

I want to establish a chronological sequence of the events that occurred for each person, so that the story can have a sequence and make evaluative points. My first question (that is more setting the scene and enabling a conversation to begin) would be to ask a general one such as an introductory comment: lets begin with talking about...

- How long have you been living in Kaitaia?
- A follow-up question might be: How did you come to be living here (at the Rest Home/pensioner flats).
- Tell me about your experience of the floods (or if question too broad ask question that relates to a specific time and place: Tell me about when you became aware of the flooding and what happened.
- Tell me about what happened the night you were evacuated?
- Tell me what has happened since the evacuation/ ask about the return home. (The pensioners weren't able to return home so I will be hoping to get an extended story, otherwise I will ask specific questions about challenges they have faced in order to enable the 'storying' of events).
- I would also be interested in finding out about social networks after the flood and how much they had talked about the flood to others.

Appendix 6

Photograph of stop-bank and location of pensioner flats

